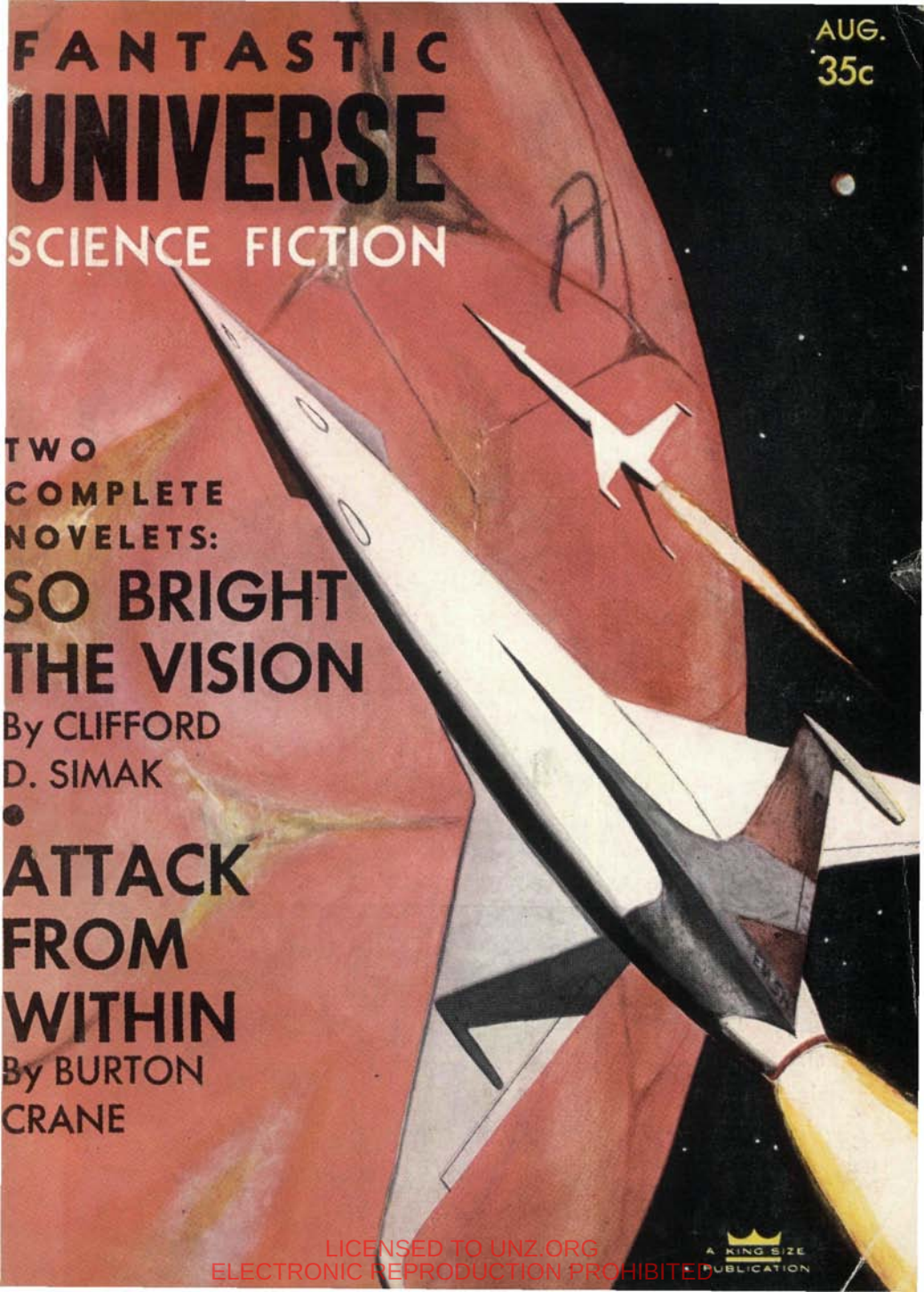

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THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER . . .

AN AGE WHICH WORSHIPS POWER seldom makes a virtue of simplicity, and the peculiar virtues and beauties of simplicity are difficult to reconcile with what we have come to regard as the naked ruthlessness of power. It is perhaps a major weakness of our changing civilization that attributes which actually complement one another should thus seem poles apart and hopelessly antagonistic.

But in every weakness there is a modicum of strength, and we have only to isolate what is sound and intelligent in our appraisal of conflicting trends to light a pathway to the stars. Power and simplicity really do walk arm in arm. It is only the *abuse* of power which wars against simplicity, and a distorted, artificial kind of simplicity which imagines it can dispense with power.

A high degree of functionalism, for instance, is inherent in simplicity and functionalism cannot exist apart from power. The streamlined and the forceful—good concepts too when not abused—have a magnificent way of eliminating all waste expenditure, and appeal so strongly to our aesthetic sense that a modern man might well be forgiven for comparing them occasionally to a sunset, or even to a poem by Coleridge or a painting by Van Gogh.

The conflict is not nearly as deep and wide as it seems, and enlightened understanding is quite capable of resolving it completely.

It is with such understanding that we must approach this month's dramatically impressive cover illustration. The two slender space rockets sweeping in toward the planet of a distant star are resplendently unadorned. They may be golden-winged, with plumage of fire. But there is no peacock ornamentation here, no velvet-purple panoply outspread to the dawn. There are swift and silent and powerful—symbols of Man's creative genius astride some unimaginable crest in the mighty ocean of Time. There is a cosmic grandeur in their swift, bright passage, and beauty, and an imperishable surmise.

FRANK BELKNAP LONG

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We're Looking For People Who Like To Draw!

by Albert Dorne

FAMOUS MAGAZINE ILLUSTRATOR

DO YOU LIKE TO DRAW? If you do —America's 12 Most Famous Artists are looking for you. We want you to test your art talent!

Too many persons miss a wonderful career in art—simply because they don't think they have talent. But my colleagues and I have helped thousands of people get started. Like these—

America's 12 Most Famous Artists

NORMAN ROCKWELL
JON WHITCOMB
AL PARKER
STEVAN DOHANOS
HAROLD VON SCHMIDT
PETER HELCK
FRED LUDEKENS
BEN STAHL
ROBERT FAWCETT
AUSTIN BRIGGS
DONG KINGMAN
ALBERT DORNE

Don Smith lives in New Orleans. Three years ago Don knew nothing about art—even doubted he had talent. Today, he is an illustrator with a leading advertising agency in the South—and has a future as big as he wants to make it.

John Busketta is another. He was a pipe-fitter's helper with a big gas company—until he decided to do something about his urge to draw. He still works for the same company—but as an artist in the advertising department. At a big increase in pay!

Don Golemba of Detroit stepped up from railroad worker to the styling department of a major automobile company. Now he helps design new car models!

A salesgirl in West Virginia who liked to draw got a job as an artist, later became advertising manager of the best store in Charleston. A married man with three children—unhappy in a dead-end job—switched to a great new career in art. Now he's one of the happiest men you'll ever meet!

How about you? Wouldn't you like to trade places with these happy artists?

We want to help you find out if you have the talent for a fascinating money-making art career (part time or full time). We'll be glad to send you our remarkably revealing 8-page talent test. Thousands of people formerly paid $1 for this test. But now we'll send it to you *free*—if you sincerely like to draw. No obligation on your part. But act at once. Simply mail the coupon provided below.

FAMOUS ARTISTS SCHOOLS
Studio 223-H, Westport, Conn.

Send me, without obligation, your Famous Artists Talent Test.

Mr.
Mrs. _____ Age____
Miss (PLEASE PRINT)

Address _____

City, Zone, State _____

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, Vol. 6, No. 1. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 471 Park Avenue, N. Y. 22, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, New York, N. Y. The characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious and have no relation to any persons living or dead. © 1956, by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC. All rights reserved. AUG. 1956. PRINTED U. S. A.

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Paul Harvey Hails New Way For Deaf To Hear Clearly Again

NEW YORK CITY (Special)—A sensational new discovery in the miracle science of electronics that helps the hard-of-hearing hear clearly again was hailed by Paul Harvey, famous news commentator, on his American Broadcasting Co. broadcast Sunday night.

Harvey revealed that this new discovery helps even those suffering a severe hearing loss to hear again with unbelievable clearness. It is so revolutionary it makes vacuum-tube hearing aids obsolete. Nothing shows in the ear except a tiny, almost invisible device.

"This new invention changes the lives of the hard-of-hearing overnight," Harvey said. "I've seen it happen to someone I know intimately."

Harvey urged his listeners to find out how this amazing discovery can bring new happiness and success to their loved ones who need better hearing.

To acquaint readers of this magazine with this new way to hear clearly again, a fascinating book with complete facts will be sent free, in a plain wrapper. No cost or obligation. Send your request on a postcard to Electronic Research Director, Dept. B-100, Belton Hearing Aid Co., 1227 Loyola Avenue, Chicago 26, Illinois.

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so bright the vision

by . . . Clifford D. Simak

The future will not diminish the anguish of men who create and dream. But anguish and shining courage often walk arm in arm.

THE SHOWROOM was in the decorous part of town, where Kemp Hart seldom found himself. It was a long way from his usual haunts and he was surprised to find that he had walked so far. In fact, he would not have walked at all if his credit had been good at the Bright Star bar where his crowd hung out.

As soon as he realized where he was he knew he should turn around and walk rapidly away, for he was out of place in this district of swank publishers, gold-plated warrens and famous eateries. But the showroom held him. It would not let him go. He stood in front of it in all his down-at-heels unkemptness, one hand thrust in a pocket, fugitively rubbing between thumb and finger the two small coins that still remained to him.

Behind the glass the machines were shining-wonderful, the sort of merchandise that belonged on this svelte and perfumed street. One machine in the corner of the showroom was bigger and shinier than the others and had about it a

Clifford Simak was born in Millville, Wisconsin, and has been a highly successful newspaperman for most of his adult life. He has had more than a hundred stories published, most of them science fiction, and is one of the eighteen prominent writers listed in L. Sprague de Camp's SCIENCE-FICTION HANDBOOK. *De Camp compares him to Asimov, pointing out that their clear, spare, fast-moving styles are very much alike. We might add that Asimov and Simak are both dreamers, and no two dreamers are ever alike in quite the same star-bright way, as this astoundingly prophetic journey into the future so vividly attests.*

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rare glint of competence. It had a massive keyboard for the feeding in of data and it had a hundred slots or so for the working tapes and films. It had a mood control calibrated more sensitively than any he had ever seen and in all probability a lot of other features that were not immediately apparent.

With a machine such as that, Hart told himself, a man could become famous almost automatically and virtually overnight. He could write anything he wished and he would write it well and the doors of the most snooty of the publishers would stand open to him.

But much as he might wish to, there was no use of going in to see it. There was nothing to be gained by even thinking about it. It was just something he could stand and look at from beyond the showroom's glass.

And yet, he told himself, he had a perfect right to go in and look it over. There was not a thing to stop him. Nothing, at least, beyond the sneer upon the salesman's face at the sight of him—the silent, polite, well-disciplined contempt when he turned and slunk away.

He looked furtively up and down the street and the street was empty. The hour was far too early for this particular street to have come to life, and it occurred to him that if he just walked in and asked to see the machine, it would be all right. Perhaps he could explain he did not wish to buy it, but just to look at it. Maybe if he did that they wouldn't sneer at him. Certainly no one could object. There must be a lot of people, even rich and famous people, who only came to look.

He edged along the showroom, studying the machines and heading for the door, telling himself that he would not go in, that it was foolish to go in, but secretly knowing that he would.

He reached the door and opened it and stepped inside. The salesman appeared almost as if by magic.

"The yarner in the corner," Hart said. "I wonder if I might—"

"Most certainly," said the salesman. "If you'll just come along with me."

In the corner of the showroom, the salesman draped his arm across the machine affectionately.

"It is our newest model," he said. "We call it the Classic, because it has been designed and engineered with but one thought in mind—the production of the classic. It is, we think, a vast improvement over our Best Seller Model which, after all, is intended to turn out no better than best sellers—even though on occasion it has turned out certain minor classics. To be quite honest with you, sir, I would suspect that in almost everyone of those instances, it had been souped up a bit. I am told some people are very clever that way."

Hart shook his head. "Not me.

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I'm all thumbs when it comes to tinkering."

"In that case," said the salesman, "the thing for you to do is buy the best yarner that you can. Used intelligently, there's virtually no limit to its versatility. And in this particular model the quality factor is much higher than in any of the others. Although, naturally, to get the best results you must be selective in your character films and your narrative problem tapes. But that needn't worry you. We have a large stock of tapes and films and some new mood and atmosphere fixers that are quite unique. They come fairly high, of course, but—"

"By the way, just what is the price of this model?"

"It's only twenty-five thousand," the salesman told him, brightly. "Don't you wonder, sir, how it can be offered at so ridiculous a figure? The engineering that went into it is remarkable. We worked on it for ten full years before we were satisfied. And during those ten years the specifications were junked and redrawn time and time again to keep pace with our developmental research."

He slapped the shiny machine with a jubilant hand.

"I can guarantee you, sir, that nowhere can you get a product superior to this. It has everything. Millions of probability factors have been built into it, assuring you of sure-fire originality. No danger of stumbling into the stereotype, which is not true at all with so many of the cheaper models. The narrative bank alone is capable of turning out an almost infinite number of situations on any particular theme and the character developer has thousands of points of reference instead of the hundred or so you find in inferior models. The semantics section is highly selective and sensitive and you must not overlook—"

"It's a good machine," interposed Hart. "But it costs a bit too much. Now, if you had something else . . ."

"Most certainly, sir. We have many other models."

"Would you take a machine in trade?"

"Gladly. What kind of machine do you have, sir?"

"An Auto-Author Ninety-six."

The salesman froze just slightly. He shook his head, half sadly, half in bewilderment. "Well, now, I don't know if we could allow you much for that. It's a fairly old type of machine. Almost obsolete."

"But you could give me something?"

"I think so. Not a great deal, though."

"And time payment?"

"Yes, certainly. We could work something out. If you would give me your name."

Hart told him what it was.

The salesman jotted it down and said, "Excuse me a moment, sir."

Hart stood for a moment, looking after him. Then, like a sneak thief in the night, he moved softly

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to the front door and walked swiftly down the street.

There was no use in staying. No use at all of waiting for the salesman to come back and shake his hand and say, "We're very sorry, sir."

We're very sorry, sir, because we've looked up your credit rating and it's absolutely worthless. We checked your sales record and found you sold just one short story in the last six months.

"It had been a mistake to go for a walk at all," Hart told himself, not without bitterness.

II

DOWNTOWN, in a section of the city far removed from the glamorous showroom, Hart climbed six flights of stairs because the elevator was out of whack again.

Behind the door that said *Irving Publications,* the preoccupied receptionist stopped filing her nails long enough to make a motion with her thumb toward the inner office.

"Go on in and see him," she said.

Ben Irving sat behind a heaped-up desk cluttered with manuscripts, proofs and lay-out sheets. His sleeves were rolled up to his elbows and he wore an eyeshade. He always wore the eyeshade and that was one of the minor mysteries of the place, for at no time during the day was there light enough in his dingy office to blind a self-respecting bat.

He looked up and blinked at Hart.

"Glad to see you, Kemp," he said. "Sit down. What's on your mind today?"

Hart took a chair. "I was wondering. About that last story that I sent you—"

"Haven't got around to it yet," said Irving. He waved his hand at the mess upon his desk by way of explanation.

"Mary!" he shouted.

The receptionist stuck her head inside the door.

"Get Hart's manuscript," he said, "and let Millie have a look at it."

Irving leaned back in his chair. "This won't take long," he said. "Millie's a fast reader."

"I'll wait," said Hart.

"I've got something for you," Irving told him. "We're starting a new magazine, aimed at the tribes out in the Algol system. They're a primitive sort of people, but they can read, Lord love them. We had the devil's own time finding someone who could do the translations for us and it'll cost more than we like to pay to have the type set up. They got the damnedest alphabet you ever saw. We finally found a printer who had some in his fonts."

"What kind of stuff?" Hart asked.

"Simple humanoid," Irving replied. "Blood and thunder and a lot of spectacle. Life is tough and hard out there, so we have to give

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them something with plenty of color in it that's easy to read. Nothing fancy, mind you."

"Sounds all right."

"Good basic hack," said Irving. "See how it goes out there and if it goes all right we'll make translations for some of the primitive groups out in the Capella region. Minor changes, maybe, but none too serious."

He squinted meditatively at Hart.

"Not too much pay. But if it goes over we'll want a lot of it."

"I'll see what I can do," said Hart. "Any taboos? Anything to duck?"

"No religion at all," the editor told him. "They've got it, of course, but it's so complicated that you'd better steer clear of it entirely. No mushy stuff. Love don't rate with them. They buy their women and don't fool around with love. Treasure and greed would be good. Any standard reference work will give you a line on that. Fantastic weapons—the more gruesome the better. Bloodshed, lots of it. Hatred, that's their dish. Hatred and vengeance and hell-for-leather living. And you simply got to keep it moving."

"I'll see what I can do."

"That's the second time you've said that."

"I'm not doing so good, Ben. Once I could have told you yes. Once I could have hauled it over by the ton."

"Lost the touch?"

"Not the touch. The machine. My yarner is haywire. I might just as well try to write my stories by hand."

Irving shuddered at the thought.

"Fix it up," he said. "Tinker with it."

"I'm no good at that. Anyhow, it's too old. Almost obsolete."

"Well, do the best you can. I'd like to go on buying from you."

The girl came in. Without looking at Hart she laid the manuscript down upon the desk. From where he sat, Hart could see the single word the machine had stamped upon its face: REJECTED.

"Emphatic," said the girl. "Millie almost stripped a gear."

Irving pitched the manuscript to Hart.

"Sorry, Kemp. Better luck next time."

Hart rose, holding the manuscript in his hand. "I'll try this other thing," he said.

He started for the door.

"Just a minute," Irving said, his voice sympathetic.

Hart turned back.

Irving brought out his billfold, stripped out two tens and held them out.

"No," said Hart, staring at the bills longingly.

"It's a loan," said the editor. "Damn it, man, you can take a loan. You'll be bringing me some stuff."

"Thanks, Ben. I'll remember this."

He stuffed the bills into his pocket and made a swift retreat.

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Bitter dust burned in his throat and there was a hard, cold lump in the center of his belly.

Got something for you, Ben had said. *Good basic hack.*

Good basic hack.

So that was what he'd sunk to!

Angela Maret was the only patron in the Bright Star bar when Hart finally arrived there, with money in his pocket and a man-sized hankering for a glass of beer. Angela was drinking a weird sort of pink concoction that looked positively poisonous. She had her glasses on and her hair skinned back and was quite obviously on a literary binge. It was a shame, Hart thought. She could be attractive, but preferred not to be.

The instant Hart joined her Blake, the bartender, came over to the table and just stood there, with his fists firmly planted on his hips.

"Glass of beer," Hart told him.

"No more cuff," Blake said, with an accusing stare.

"Who said anything about cuff? I'll pay for it."

Blake scowled. "Since you're loaded, how about paying on the bill?"

"I haven't got that kind of money. Do I get the beer or don't I?"

Watching Blake waddle back to the bar, Hart was glad he had had the foresight to stop and buy a pack of cigarettes to break one of the tens. Flash a ten in this joint and Blake would be on in a second and have it chalked against his bill.

"Staked?" Angela asked sweetly.

"An advance," Hart told her, lying like a gentleman. "Irving has some stuff for me to do. He'll need a lot of it. It doesn't pay too well, of course."

Blake came with the beer and plunked it down on the table and waited pointedly for Hart to do the expected thing.

Hart paid him and he waddled off.

"Have you heard about Jasper?" Angela asked.

Hart shook his head. "Nothing recent," he said. "Did he finish his book?"

Angela's face lit up. "He's going on vacation. Can you imagine that? *Him* going on vacation!"

"I don't see why not," Hart protested. "Jasper has been selling. He's the only one of us who manages to stay loaded week after week."

"But that's not it, Kemp. Wait until I tell you—it simply is a scream. Jasper thinks he can write better if he goes off on vacation."

"Well, why not? Just last year Don went to one of those summer camps. That Bread Loaf thing, as they call it."

"All they do there," she said, "is brush up on mechanics. It's a sort of refresher course on the gadgetry of yarners. How to soup up the old heap so it'll turn out fresher stuff."

"I still don't see why Jasper

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can't take a vacation if he can afford it."

"You're so dense," said Angela. "Don't you get the point at all?"

"I get the point all right. Jasper thinks there's still a human factor in our writing. He's not entirely satisfied to get his facts out of a standard reference work or encyclopedia. He's not content to let the yarner define an emotion he has never felt or the color of a sunset he has never seen. He was nuts enough to hint at that and you and the rest of them have been riding him. No wonder the guy is eccentric. No wonder he keeps his door locked all the time."

"That locked door," Angela said cattily, "is symbolic of the kind of man he is."

"I'd lock my door," Hart told her. "I'd be eccentric too—if I could turn it out like Jasper. I'd walk on my hands. I'd wear a sarong. I'd even paint my face bright blue."

"You sound like you believe the same as Jasper does."

He shook his head. "No, I don't think the way he does. I know better. But if he wants to think that way let him go ahead and think it."

"You do," she crowed at him. "I can see it in your face. You think it's possible to be independently creative."

"No, I don't. I know it's the machines that do the creating—not us. We're nothing but attic tinkers. We're literary mechanics. And I suppose that's the way it should be. There is, naturally, the yearning for the past. That's been evident in every age. The 'good old days' complex. Back in those days a work of fiction was writ by hand and human agony."

"The agony's still with us, Kemp."

He said: "Jasper's a mechanic. That's what's wrong with me. I can't even repair that junk-heap of mine and you should see the way Jasper has his clunk souped up."

"You could hire someone to repair it. There are firms that do excellent work."

"I never have the money."

He finished his beer.

"What's that stuff you're drinking?" he asked. "Want another one?"

She pushed her glass away. "I don't like that mess," she said. "I'll have a beer with you, if you don't mind."

Hart signaled to Blake for two beers.

"What are you doing now, Angela?" he asked. "Still working on the book?"

"Working up some films," she said.

"That's what I'll have to do this afternoon. I need a central character for this Irving stuff. Big and tough and boisterous—but not too uncouth. I'll look along the riverfront."

"They come high now, Kemp," she said. "Even those crummy aliens are getting wise to us. Even the ones from *way out.* I paid

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twenty for one just the other day and he wasn't too hot, either."

"It's cheaper than buying made-up films."

"Yes, I agree with you there. But it's a lot more work."

Blake brought the beer and Hart counted out the change into his waiting palm.

"Get some of this new film," Angela advised. "It's got the old stuff beat forty different ways. The delineation is sharper and you catch more of the marginal factors. You get a more rounded picture of the character. You pick up all the nuances of the subject, so to speak. It makes your people more believable. I've been using it."

"It comes high, I suppose," he said.

"Yes, it's a bit expensive," she admitted.

"I've got a few spools of the old stuff. I'll have to get along with that."

"I've an extra fifty you can have."

He shook his head. "Thanks, Angela. I'll cadge drinks and bum meals and hit up for a cigarette, but I'm not taking a fifty you'll need yourself. There's none of us so solvent we can lend someone else a fifty."

"Well, I would have done so gladly. If you should change your mind—"

"Want another beer?" Hart asked, cutting her short.

"I have to get to work."

"So have I," said Hart.

III

HART climbed the stairs to the seventh floor, then went down the corridor and knocked on Jasper Hansen's door.

"Just a minute," said a voice from within the room.

He waited for three minutes. Finally a key grated in the lock and the door was opened wide.

"Sorry I took so long," apologized Jasper. "I was setting up some data and I couldn't quit. Had to finish it."

Hart nodded. Jasper's explanation was understandable. It was difficult to quit in the middle of setting up some data that had taken hours to assemble.

The room was small and littered. In one corner stood the yarner, a shining thing, but not as shiny as the one he'd seen that morning in the uptown showroom. A typewriter stood on a littered desk, half covered by the litter. A long shelf sagged with the weight of dog-eared reference works. Bright-jacketed books were piled helter-skelter in a corner. A cat slept on an unmade bed. A bottle of liquor stood on a cupboard beside a loaf of bread. Dirty dishes were piled high in the sink.

"Heard you're going on vacation, Jasper," Hart said.

Jasper gave him a wary look. "Yes, I thought I might."

"I was wondering, Jasper, if you'd do something for me."

"Just name it."

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"When you're gone, could I use your yarner?"

"Well, now, I don't know, Kemp. You see—"

"Mine is busted and I haven't the cash to fix it. But I've got a line on something. If you'd let me use yours, I could turn out enough in a week or two to cover the repair bill."

"Well, now," said Jasper, "you know I'd do anything for you. Anything at all. But that yarner—I just can't let you use it. I got it jiggered up. There isn't a circuit in it that has remained the way it was originally. There isn't a soul but myself who could operate it. If someone else tried to operate it they might burn it out or kill themselves or something."

"You could show me, couldn't you?" Hart asked, almost pleadingly.

"It's far too complicated. I've tinkered with it for years," said Jasper.

Hart managed a feeble grin. "I'm sorry. I thought—"

Jasper draped an arm around his shoulder. "Anything else. Just ask me anything."

"Thanks," said Hart, turning to go.

"Drink?"

"No, thanks," said Hart, and walked out of the door.

He climbed two more flights to the topmost floor and went into his room. His door was never locked. There was nothing in it for anyone to steal. And for that matter, he wondered, what did Jasper have that anyone might want?

He sat down in a rickety chair and stared at his yarner. It was old and battered and ornery, and he hated it.

It was worthless, absolutely worthless, and yet he knew he would have to work with it. It was all he had. He'd slave and reason with it and kick it and swear at it and he'd spend sleepless nights with it. And gurgling and clucking with overweaning gratitude, it would turn out endless reams of mediocrity that no one would buy.

He got up, and walked to the window. Far below lay the river and at the wharfs a dozen ships were moored, disgorging rolls of paper to feed the hungry presses that thundered day and night. Across the river a spaceship was rising from the spaceport, with the faint blue flicker of the ion stream wisping from the tubes. He watched it until it was out of sight.

There were other ships, with their noses pointed at the sky, waiting for the signal—the punched button, the flipped switch, the flicker of a piece of navigation tape—that would send them hounding homeward. First out into the blackness and then into that other place of weird other-worldness that annihilated time and space, setting at defiance the theoretic limit of the speed of light. Ships from many stars, all come to Earth for one thing only, for the one commodity that Earthmen had to sell.

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He pulled his eyes from the fascination of the spaceport and looked across the sprawling city, the tumbled, canted, box-like rectangles of the district where he lived, while far to the north shone the faery towers and the massive greatness of the famous and the wise.

A fantastic world, he thought. A fantastic world to live in. Not the kind of world that H. G. Wells and Stapledon had dreamed. With them it had been far wandering and galactic empire, a glory and a greatness that Earth had somehow missed when the doors to space had finally been opened. Not the thunder of the rocket, but the thunder of the press. Not the great and lofty purpose, but the faint, quiet, persistent voice spinning out a yarn. Not the far sweep of great new planets, but the attic room and the driving fear that the machine would fail you, that the tapes had been used too often, that the data was all wrong.

He went to the desk and pulled all three of the drawers. He found the camera in the bottom one beneath a pile of junk. He hunted for and found the film in the middle drawer, wrapped in aluminum foil.

Rough and tough, he thought, and it shouldn't be too hard to find a man like that in one of the dives along the riverfront, where the space crews on planet leave squandered their pay checks.

The first dive he entered was oppressive with the stink of a group of spidery creatures from Spica and he didn't stay. He grimaced distastefully and got out as fast as he could. The second was repellently patronized by a few cat-like denizens of Dahib and they were not what he was looking for.

But in the third he hit the jackpot, a dozen burly humanoids from Caph — great brawling creatures with a flair for extravagance in dress, a swashbuckling attitude and a prodigious appetite for lusty living. They were grouped about a large round table out in the center of the room and they were whooping it up. They were pounding the table with their tankards and chivvying the scuttling proprietor about and breaking into songs that they repeatedly interrupted with loud talk and argument.

Hart slipped into an unoccupied booth and watched the Caphians celebrate. One of them, bigger and louder and rowdier than the rest, wore red trousers, and a bright green shirt. Looped necklaces of platinum and outlandish alien gems encircled his throat and glittered on his chest, and his hair had not been trimmed for months. He wore a beard that was faintly satanic and, startlingly enough, his ears were slightly pointed. He looked like an ugly customer to get into a fracas with, and so, thought Hart, he's just the boy I want.

The proprietor finally lumbered over to the booth.

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"Beer," said Hart. "A big glass."

"Buster," said the man, "no one drinks beer here."

"Well, then, what have you got?"

"I got *bocca* and *igno* and *hzbut* and *greno* and—

"Bocca," said Hart. He knew what *bocca* was and he didn't recognize any of the others. Lord knows what some of them might do to the human constitution. *Bocca,* at least, one could survive.

The man went away and in a little while came back with a mug of *bocca.* It was faintly greenish and it sizzled just a little. What was worse, it tasted like a very dilute solution of sulphuric acid.

Hart squeezed himself back into the corner of the booth and opened his camera case. He set the camera on the table, no farther forward than was necessary to catch Green Shirt in the lens. Sighting through the finder, he got the Caphian in focus, and then quickly pressed the button that set the instrument in motion.

Once that was done, he settled down to drinking *bocca.*

He sat there, gagging down the *bocca* and manipulating the camera. Fifteen minutes was all he needed. At the end of fifteen minutes Green Shirt would be on film. Probably not as good as if he had been using the new-fangled spools that Angela was using, but at least he'd have him.

The camera ground on, recording the Caphian's physical characteristics, his personal mannerisms, his habits of speech, his thought processes (if any), his way of life, his background, his theoretic reaction in the face of any circumstance.

Not three-dimensional, thought Hart, not too concise nor too distinctive, not digging deep into the character and analyzing him—but good enough for the kind of tripe he'd have to write for Irving.

Take this joker and surround him with a few other ruffians chosen haphazardly from the file. Use one of the films from the Deep Dark Villain reel, throw in an ingenious treasure situation and a glob of violence, dream up some God-awful background, and he'd have it. He'd have it, that is, if the yarner worked . . .

Ten minutes gone. Just five more to go. In five more minutes he'd stop the camera, put it back into its case, slip the case into his pocket and get out of the place as fast as he could. Without causing undue notice, of course.

It had been simple, he thought—much simpler than he could possibly have imagined.

They're getting on to us, Angela had said. *Even these crummy aliens.*

Only three more minutes to go.

A hand came down from nowhere, and picked up the camera. Hart swiveled around. The proprietor stood directly behind him, with the camera under his arm.

Good Lord, thought Hart, *I was watching the Caphians so closely I forgot about this guy!*

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The proprietor roared at him: "So! You sneak in here under false pretences to get your film! Are you trying to give my place a bad name?"

Swiftly Hart flung himself out of the booth, one frantic eye on the door. There was just a chance that he might make it. But the proprietor stuck out an expert foot and tripped him. Hart landed on his shoulders and somersaulted. He skidded across the floor, smashed into a table and rolled half under it.

The Caphians had come to their feet and were looking at him. He could see that they were hoping he'd get his head bashed in.

The proprietor hurled the camera with great violence to the floor. It came apart with an ugly, splintering sound. The film rolled free and snaked across the floor. The lens wobbled crazily. A spring came unloose from somewhere and went *zing*. It stood out at an angle, quivering.

Hart gathered his feet beneath him, and leaped out from the table. The Caphians started moving in on him—not rushing him, not threatening him in any way. They just kept walking toward him and spreading out so that he couldn't make a dash for the door.

He backed away, step by careful step, and the Caphians still continued their steady advance.

Suddenly he leaped straight toward them in a direct assault on the center of the line. He yelled and lowered his head and caught Green Shirt squarely in the belly. He felt the Caphian stagger and lurch to one side, and for a split second he thought that he had broken free.

But a hairy, muscular hand reached out and grabbed him and flung him to the floor. Someone kicked him. Someone stepped on his fingers. Someone else picked him up and threw him—straight through the open door into the street outside.

He landed on his back and skidded, with the breath completely knocked out of him. He came to rest with a jolt against the curbing opposite the place from which he had been heaved.

The Caphians, the full dozen of them, were grouped around the doorway, aroar with booming laughter. They slapped their thighs, and pounded one another on the back. They doubled over, shrieking. They shouted pleasantries and insults at him. Half of the jests he did not understand, but the ones that registered were enough to make his blood run cold.

He got up cautiously, and tested himself. He was considerably bruised and battered and his clothes were torn. But seemingly he had escaped any broken bones. He tried a few steps, limping. He tried to run and was surprised to find that he could.

Behind him the Caphians were still laughing. But there was no telling at what moment they might

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cease to think that his predicament was funny and start after him in earnest—for blood.

He raced down the street and ducked into an alley that led to a tangled square. He crossed the square into another street without pausing for breath and went running on. Finally he became satisfied that he was safe and sat down on a doorstep in an alley to regain his breath and carefully review the situation.

The situation, he realized, was bad. He not only had failed to get the character he needed. He had lost his camera, suffered a severe humiliation and barely escaped with his life.

There wasn't a thing that he could do about it. Actually, he told himself, he had been extremely lucky. For he didn't have a legal leg to stand on. He'd been entirely in the wrong. To film a character without the permission of the character's original was against the law.

It wasn't that he was a lawbreaker, he thought. It wasn't as if he'd deliberately set out to break the law. He'd been forced into it. Anyone who might have consented to serve as a character would have demanded money—more money than he was in a position to shell out.

But he did desperately need a character! He simply had to have one, or face utter defeat.

He saw that the sun had set, and that twilight was drifting in. The day, he thought, had been utterly wasted, and he had only himself to blame.

A passing police officer stopped and looked into the alley.

"You," he said to Hart. "What are you sitting there for?"

"Resting," Hart told him.

"All right. You're rested. Now get a move on."

Hart got a move on.

IV

HE WAS nearing home when he heard the crying in the areaway between an apartment house and a bindery. It was a funny sort of crying, a not-quite-human crying—perhaps not so much a crying as a sound of grief and loneliness.

He halted abruptly and stared around him. The crying had cut off, but soon it began again. It was a low and empty crying, a hopeless crying, a crying to one's self.

For a moment he stood undecided, then started to go on. But he had not gone three paces before he turned back. He stepped into the areaway and at the second step his foot touched something lying on the ground.

He squatted and looked at the form that lay there, crying to itself. It was a bundle—that described it best—a huddled, limp, sad bundle that moaned heartbrokenly.

He put a hand beneath it and lifted it and was surprised at how little weight it had. Holding it firmly with one hand, he searched

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with the other for his lighter. He flicked the lighter and the flame was feeble, but he saw enough to make his stomach flop. It was an old blanket with a face that once had started out to be humanoid and then, for some reason, had been forced to change its mind. And that was all there was—a blanket and a face.

He thumbed the lighter down and crouched in the dark, his breath rasping in his throat. The creature was not only an alien. It was, even by alien standards, almost incredible. And how had an alien strayed so far from the spaceport? Aliens seldom wandered. They never had the time to wander, for the ships came in, freighted up with fiction, and almost immediately took off again. The crews stayed close to the rocket berths, seldom venturing farther than the dives along the riverfront.

He rose, holding the creature bundled across his chest as one would hold a child—it was not as heavy as a child—and feeling the infantlike warmth of it against his body and a strange companionship. He stood in the areaway while his mind went groping back in an effort to unmask the faint recognition he had felt. Somewhere, somehow, it seemed he once had heard or read of an alien such as this. But surely that was ridiculous, for aliens did not come, even the most fantastic of them, as a living blanket with the semblance of a face.

He stepped out into the street and looked down to examine the face again. But a portion of the creature's blanket-body had draped itself across its features and he could see only a weaving blur.

Within two blocks he reached the Bright Star bar, went around the corner to the side door and started up the stairs. Footsteps were descending and he squeezed himself against the railing to let the other person past.

"Kemp," said Angela Maret. "Kemp, what have you there?"

"I found it in the street," Hart told her.

He shifted his arm a little and the blanket-body slipped and she saw the face. She moved back against the railing, her hand going to her mouth to choke off a scream.

"Kemp! How awful!"

"I think that it is sick. It—"

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," Hart said. "It was crying to itself. It was enough to break your heart. I couldn't leave it there."

"I'll get Doc Julliard."

Hart shook his head. "That wouldn't do any good. Doc doesn't know any alien medicine. Besides, he's probably drunk."

"No one knows any alien medicine," Angela reminded him. "Maybe we could get one of the specialists uptown." Her face clouded. "Doc is resourceful, though. He has to be down here. Maybe he could tell us—"

"All right," Hart said. "See if you can rout out Doc."

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In his room he laid the alien on the bed. It was no longer whimpering. Its eyes were closed and it seemed to be asleep, although he could not be sure.

He sat on the edge of the bed and studied it and the more he looked at it the less sense it seemed to make. Now he could see how thin the blanket body was, how light and fragile. It amazed him that a thing so fragile could live at all, that it could contain in so inadequate a body the necessary physiological machinery to keep itself alive.

He wondered if it might be hungry, and if so what kind of food it required. If it were really ill how could he hope to take care of it when he didn't know the first basic thing about it?

Maybe Doc— But, no, Doc would know no more than he did. Doc was just like the rest of them, living hand to mouth, cadging drinks whenever he could get them, and practicing medicine without adequate equipment and with a knowledge that had stopped dead in his tracks forty years before.

He heard footsteps coming up the stairs—light steps and trudging heavy ones. It had to be Angela with Doc. She had found him quickly and that probably meant he was sober enough to act and think with a reasonable degree of coordination.

Doc came into the room, followed by Angela. He put down his bag and looked at the creature on the bed.

"What have we here?" he asked and probably it was the first time in his entire career that the smug doctorish phrase made sense.

"Kemp found it in the street," said Angela quickly. "It's stopped crying now."

"Is this a joke?" Doc asked, half wrathfully. "If it is, young man, I consider it in the worst possible taste."

Hart shook his head. "It's no joke. I thought that you might know—"

"Well, I don't," said Doc, with aggressive bitterness.

He let go of the blanket edge and it quickly flopped back upon the bed.

He paced up and down the room for a turn or two. Then he whirled angrily on Angela and Hart.

"I suppose you think that I should do something," he said. "I should at least go through the motions. I should act like a doctor. I'm sure that is what you're thinking. I should take its pulse and its temperature and look at its tongue and listen to its heart. Well, suppose you tell me how I do these things. Where do I find the pulse? If I could find it, what is its normal rate? And if I could figure out some way to take its temperature, what is the normal temperature for a monstrosity such as this? And if you would be so kind, would you tell me how—short of dissection—I could hope to locate the heart?"

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He picked up his bag and started for the door.

"Anyone else, Doc?" Hart pleaded, in a conciliatory tone. "Anyone who'd know?"

"I doubt it," Doc snapped.

"You mean there's *no one* who can do a thing? Is that what you're trying to say?"

"Look, son. Human doctors treat human beings, period. Why should we be expected to do more? How often are we called upon to treat an alien? We're not *expected* to treat aliens. Oh, possibly, once in a while some specialist or researcher may dabble in alien medicine. But that is the correct name for it—just plain dabbling. It takes years of a man's life to learn barely enough to qualify as a human doctor. How many lifetimes do you think we should devote to curing aliens?"

"All right, Doc. All right."

"And how can you even be sure there's something wrong with it?"

"Why, it was crying and I quite naturally thought—"

"It might have been lonesome or frightened or grieving. It might have been lost."

Doc turned to the door again.

"Thanks, Doc," Hart said.

"Not at all." The old man hesitated at the door. "You don't happen to have a dollar, do you? Somehow, I ran a little short."

"Here," said Hart, giving him a bill.

"I'll return it tomorrow," Doc promised.

He went clumping down the stairs.

Angela frowned. "You shouldn't have done that, Kemp. Now he'll get drunk and you'll be responsible."

"Not on a dollar," Hart said confidently.

"That's all you know about it. The kind of stuff Doc drinks—"

"Let him get drunk then. He deserves a little fun."

"But—" Angela motioned to the thing upon the bed.

"You heard what Doc said. He can't do anything. No one can do anything. When it wakes up—*if* it wakes up—it may be able to tell us what is wrong with it. But I'm not counting on that."

He walked over to the bed and stared down at the creature. It was repulsive and abhorrent and not in the least humanoid. But there was about it a pitiful loneliness and an incongruity that made a catch come to his throat.

"Maybe I should have left it in the areaway," he said. "I started to walk on. But when it began to cry again I went back to it. Maybe I did wrong bothering with it at all. I haven't helped it any. If I'd left it there it might have turned out better. Some other aliens may be looking for it by now."

"You did right," said Angela. "Don't start in fighting windmills."

She crossed the room and sat down in a chair. He went over to the window and stared somberly out across the city.

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"What happened to you?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"But your clothes. Just look at your clothes."

"I got thrown out of a dive. I tried to take some film."

"Without paying for it."

"I didn't have the money."

"I offered you a fifty."

"I know you did. But I couldn't take it. Don't you understand, Angela? *I simply couldn't take it.*"

She said softly, "You're bad off, Kemp."

He swung around, outraged. She hadn't needed to say that. She had no right to say it. She—

He caught himself up before the words came tumbling out.

She had the right. She'd offered him a fifty—but that had been only a part of it. She had the right to say it because she knew that she could say it. No one else in all the world could have felt the way she did about him.

"I can't write," he said. "Angela, no matter how I try, I can't make it come out right. The machine is haywire and the tapes are threadbare and most of them are patched."

"What have you had to eat today?"

"I had the beers with you and I had some *bocca.*"

"That isn't eating. You wash your face and change into some different clothes and we'll go downstairs and get you some food."

"I have eating money."

"I know you have. You told me about the advance from Irving."

"It wasn't an advance."

"I know it wasn't, Kemp."

"What about the alien?"

"It'll be all right—at least long enough for you to get a bite to eat. You can't help it by standing here. You don't know how to help it."

"I guess you're right."

"Of course I am. Now get going and wash your dirty face. And don't forget your ears."

V

JASPER HANSEN was alone in the Bright Star bar. They went over to his table and sat down. Jasper was finishing a dish of sauerkraut and pig's knuckles and was drinking wine with it, which seemed a bit blasphemous.

"Where's everyone else?" asked Angela.

"There's a party down the street," said Jasper. "Someone sold a book."

"Someone that we know?"

"Hell, no," Jasper said. "Just someone sold a book. You don't have to know a guy to go to his party when he sells a book."

"I didn't hear anything about it."

"Neither did the rest of the bunch. Someone looked in at the door and hollered about the party and everyone took off. Everyone but me. I can't monkey with no party. I've got work to do."

"Free food?" asked Angela.

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"Yeah. Don't it beat you, though. Here we are, honorable and respected craftsmen, and every one of us will break a leg to grab himself a sandwich and a drink."

"Times are tough," said Hart.

"Not with me," said Jasper. "I keep working all the time."

"But work doesn't solve the main problem."

Jasper regarded him thoughtfully, tugging at his chin.

"What else is there?" he demanded. "Inspiration? Dedication? Genius? Go ahead and name it. We are mechanics, man. We got machines and tapes. We went into top production two hundred years ago. We mechanized so we could go into top production, so that people could turn out books and stories even if they had no talent at all. We got a job to do. We got to turn out tons of drivel for the whole damn galaxy. We got to keep them drooling over what is going to happen next to sloe-eyed Annie, queen of the far-flung spaceways. And we got to shoot up the lad with her and patch him up and shoot him up and patch him up and . . ."

He reached for an evening paper, opened it to a certain page and thumped his fist upon it.

"Did you see this?" he asked. "The Classic, they call it. Guaranteed to turn out nothing but a classic."

Hart snatched the paper from him and there it was, the wondrous yarner he had seen that morning, confronting him in all its glory from the center of a full-page ad.

"Pretty soon," said Jasper, "all you'll need to write is have a lot of money. You can go out and buy a machine like that and say turn out a story and press a button or flip a switch or maybe simply kick it and it'll cough out a story complete to the final exclamation point.

"It used to be that you could buy an old beat-up machine for, say, a hundred dollars and you could turn out any quantity of stuff —not good, but saleable. Today you got to have a high-priced machine and an expensive camera and a lot of special tape and film. Someday," he said, with a sudden flare of anger, "the human race will outwit itself. Someday it will mechanize to the point where there won't be room for humans, but only for machines."

"You do all right," said Angela.

"That's because I keep dinging my machine up all the time. It don't give me no rest. That place of mine is half study and half machine shop and I know as much about electronics as I do about narration."

Blake came shuffling over.

"What'll it be?" he growled.

"I've eaten," Angela told him. "All I want is a glass of beer."

He turned to Hart. "How about you?" he demanded.

"Give me some of that stuff Jasper has—without the wine."

"No cuff," said Blake.

"Damn it, who said anything

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about cuff. Do you expect me to pay you before you bring it."

"No," said Blake. "But immediately I bring it."

He turned and shuffled off.

"Some day," said Jasper, "there has to be a limit to it. There must be a limit to it and we must be reaching it. You can only mechanize so far. You can assign only so many human activities and duties to intelligent machines. Who, two hundred years ago, would have said that the writing of fiction could have been reduced to a matter of mechanics?"

"Who, two hundred years ago," said Hart, "could have guessed that Earth could gear itself to a literary culture? But that is precisely what we have today. Sure, there are factories that build the machines we need and lumbermen who cut the trees for pulp and farmers who grow the food, and all the other trades and skills which are necessary to keep a culture operative. But by and large the Earth today is principally devoted to the production of a solid stream of fiction for the alien trade."

"It all goes back to one peculiar trait," said Jasper. "A most unlikely trait to work—as it does—to our great advantage. We just happen to be the galaxy's only liars. In a mass of stars where truth is accepted as a universal constant, we are the one exception."

"You make it sound so horrible," protested Angela.

"I suppose I do, but that's the way it is. We could have become great traders and skinned all and sundry until they got wise to us. We could have turned our talent for the untruth into many different channels and maybe even avoided getting our heads bashed in. But instead we drifted into the one safe course. Our lying became an easy virtue. Now we can lie to our heart's content and they lap it up. No one, nowhere, except right here on Earth, ever even tried to spin a yarn for simple entertainment, or to point a moral or for any other reason. They never attempted it because it would have been a lie, and we are the only liars in the universe of stars."

Blake brought the beer for Angela and the pig knuckles for Hart. Hart paid him out of hand.

"I've still got a quarter left," he said. "Have you any pie?"

"Apple."

"Here," said Hart, "I'll pay you in advance."

"First," went on Jasper, "it was told by mouth. Then it was writ by hand and now it's fabricated by machine. But surely that's not the end of it. There must be something else. There must be another way, a better way. There must be another step."

"I would settle for anything," said Hart. "Any way at all. I'd even write by hand if I thought I could go on selling."

"You can't!" Angela told him, sharply. "Why, it's positively indecent to even joke about it. You

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can say it as a joke just among the three of us, but if I ever hear you—"

Hart waved his hand. "Let it go. I'm sorry that I said it."

"Of course," said Jasper, "it's a great testimonial to the cleverness of Man, to the adaptability and resourcefulness of the human race. It is a somewhat ludicrous application of big business methods to what had always been considered a personal profession. But it works. Some day, I have no doubt, we may see the writing business run on production lines, with fiction factories running double shifts."

"No," Angela said. "No, you're wrong there, Jasper. Even with the mechanization, it's still the loneliest business on Earth."

"It is," agreed Jasper. "But I don't regret the loneliness part. Maybe I should, but I don't."

"It's a lousy way to make a living," said Angela, with a strange half-bitterness in her voice. "What are we contributing?"

"You are making people happy—if you can call some of our readers people. You are supplying entertainment."

"And the noble ideas?"

"There are even a few of those."

"It's more than that," said Hart. "More than entertainment, more than great ideas. It's the most innocent and the deadliest propaganda in all of human history. The old writers, before the first space flight, glorified far wandering and galactic conquest and I think that they were justified. But they missed the most important development completely. They couldn't possibly foresee the way we would do it—with books, not battleships. We're softening up the galaxy with a constant stream of human thought. Our words are reaching farther than our spaceships ever could."

"That's the point I want to make," Jasper said, triumphantly. "You hit the point exactly. But if we are to tell the galaxy a story it must be a *human* story. If we sell them a bill of goods it must be a human bill of goods. And how can we keep it human if we relegate its telling to machines?"

"But they're human machines," objected Angela.

"A machine can't be purely human. Basically a machine is universal. It could be Caphian as well as human, or Alderbaran or Draconian or any other race. And that's not all. We let the machine set the norm. The one virtue of mechanics is that it sets a pattern. And a pattern is deadly in literary matters. It never changes. It keeps on using the same old limp plots in many different guises.

"Maybe at the moment it makes no difference to the races who are reading us, for as yet they have not developed anything approaching a critical faculty. But it should make some difference to us. It should make some difference in the light of a certain pride of workmanship we are supposed to have. And that is the trouble with machines. They

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are destroying the pride in us. Once writing was an art. But it is an art no longer. It's machine-produced, like a factory chair. A good chair, certainly. Good enough to sit on, but not a thing of beauty or of craftsmanship or—"

The door crashed open and feet pounded on the floor.

Just inside the door stood Green Shirt and behind him, grinning fiendishly, his band of Caphians.

Green Shirt advanced upon them happily, with his arms flung wide in greeting. He stopped beside Hart's chair and clapped a massive hand upon his shoulder.

"You recall me, don't you?" he asked in slow and careful English.

"Sure," Hart said, gulping. "Sure, I remember you. This is Miss Maret and over there is Mr. Hansen."

Green Shirt said, with precise bookishness, "So happy, I assure you."

"Have a seat," said Jasper.

"Glad to," said Green Shirt, hauling out a chair. His necklaces jingled musically as he sat down.

One of the other Caphians said something to him in a rapid-fire alien tongue. Green Shirt answered curtly and waved toward the door. The others marched outside.

"He is worried," Green Shirt said. "We will slow—how do you say it—we will slow the ship. They cannot leave without us. But I tell him not to worry. The captain will be glad we slow the ship when he see what we bring back."

He leaned forward and tapped Hart upon the knee.

"I look for you," he said. "I look high and wide."

"Who is this joker?" Jasper asked.

"*Joker?*" asked Green Shirt, frowning.

"A term of great respect," Hart hastily assured him.

"So," said Green Shirt. "You all write the stories?"

"Yes. All three of us."

"But *you* write them best."

"I wouldn't say that exactly. You see—"

"You write the wild and woolly stories? The bang-bangs?"

"Yeah. I guess I'm guilty."

Green Shirt looked apologetic. "Had I known, we would not from the tavern have thrown you out. It was just big fun. We did not know you write the stories. When we find out who you are we try to catch you. But you run and hide."

"Just what is going on here, anyhow?" Angela demanded.

Green Shirt whooped for Blake.

"Set them up," he shouted. "These are my friends. Set up the best you have."

"The best I have," Blake said, icily, "is Irish whiskey and that costs a buck a shot."

"I got the cash," said Green Shirt. "You get this name I cannot say, and you will get your cash."

He said to Hart, "I have a surprise for you, my friend. We love the writers of the bang-bangs. We

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read them *always*. We get much stimulation."

Jasper guffawed.

Green Shirt swung about in amazement, his bushy brows contracting.

"He's just happy," Hart explained, quickly. "He likes Irish whiskey."

"Fine," said Green Shirt, beaming. "You drink all you wish. I will give the cash. It is—how do you say—on me."

Blake brought the drinks and Green Shirt paid him.

"Bring the container," he said.

"The container?"

"He means the bottle."

"That'll be twenty dollars," said Blake.

"So," said Green Shirt, paying him.

They drank the whiskey and Green Shirt said to Hart, "My surprise is that you come with us."

"You mean in the ship?"

"We have never had a real live writer on our planet. You will have a good time. You will stay and write for us."

"Well," said Hart, "I'm not sure—"

"You try to take the picture. The tavern man explain it all to us. He say it is against the law. He say if I complain it will come big trouble."

"You can't do it, Kemp," protested Angela. "Don't let this big hyena bluff you. We'll pay your fine."

"We not complain," said Green Shirt, gently. "We just with you mop up the condemned place."

Blake brought the bottle and thumped it down in the center of the table. Green Shirt picked it up and filled their glasses to the brim.

"Drink up," he said and set a fine example.

Hart drank and Green Shirt filled his glass again. Hart picked up his glass and twirled it in his fingers.

There had to be a way out of this mess, he told himself. It was absurd that this thundering barbarian from one of the farther suns should be able to walk into a bar and tell a man to come along with him.

However, there was no percentage in stirring up a fight—not with ten or eleven Caphians waiting just outside.

"I explain it to you," said Green Shirt. "I try hard to explain it well so that you will—so that you will—"

"Understand," supplied Jasper Hansen.

"I thank you, Hansen man. So you will understand. We get the stories only shortly ago. Many of the other races got them long ago, but with us it is new and most wonderful. It takes us—how would you say—out of ourselves. We get many things from other stars, useful things, things to hold in the hand, things to see and use. But from you we get the going to far places, the doing of great deeds, the thinking of great things."

He filled the glasses all around again.

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"You understand?" Green Shirt asked.

They nodded.

"And now we go."

Hart rose slowly to his feet.

"Kemp, you can't!" screamed Angela.

"You shut the mouth," said Green Shirt.

Hart marched through the door and out into the street. The other Caphians oozed out of dark alleyways and surrounded him.

"Off we go," said Green Shirt, happily. "It give big time on Caph."

Halfway to the river, Hart stopped in the middle of the street.

"I can't do it," he said.

"Can't do what?" asked Green Shirt, prodding him along.

"I let you think," said Hart, "that I was the man you wanted. I did it because I'd like to see your planet. But it isn't fair. I'm not the man you want."

"You write the bang-bangs, do you not? You think up the wild and woolies?"

"Certainly. But not really good ones. Mine aren't the kind where you hang on every word. There's another man who can do it better."

"This man we want," said Green Shirt. "Can you tell us where to find him?"

"That's easy. The other man at the table with us. The one who was so happy when you ordered whiskey."

"You mean the Hansen man?"

"He is the one, exactly."

"He write the bang-bangs good?"

"Much better than I do. He's a genius at it."

Green Shirt was overcome with gratitude. He hugged Hart to him in an extravagant expression of good will.

"You fair," he said. "You fine. It was nice of you to tell us."

A window banged up in a house across the street and a man stuck his head out.

"If you guys don't break it up," he bellowed, "I'll call the cops."

"We shatter the peace," sighed Green Shirt. "It is a queer law you have."

The window banged down again.

Green Shirt put a friendly hand upon Hart's shoulder. "We love the wild and woolies," he said gravely. "We want the very best. We thank you. We find this Hansen man."

He turned around and loped back up the street, followed by his ruffians.

Hart stood on the corner and watched them go. He drew a deep breath and let it slowly out.

It had been easy, he told himself, once you got the angle. And it had been Jasper, actually, who had given him the angle. *Truth is regarded as a universal constant,* Jasper had said. *We are the only liars.*

It had turned out tough on Jasper—a downright dirty trick. But the guy wanted to go on vacation, didn't he? And here was the pros-

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pect of a travel jaunt which would be really worth while. He'd refused the use of his machine and he had guffawed insultingly when Green Shirt had asked about the wild and woolies. If ever a guy had it coming to him, Jasper Hansen was that guy.

And above and beyond all that, he always kept his door locked—which showed a contemptible suspicion of his fellow writers.

Hart swung about and walked rapidly away in an opposite direction. Eventually he'd go back home, he told himself. But not right now. Later on he'd go, when the dust had settled slightly.

VI

IT WAS dawn when Hart climbed the stairs to the seventh floor and went down the corridor to Jasper Hansen's door. The door was locked as usual. But he took out of his pocket a thin piece of spring steel he'd picked up in a junkyard and did some judicious prying. In the matter of seconds, the lock clicked back and the door swung open.

The yarner squatted in its corner, a bright and lovely sight.

Jiggered up, Jasper had affirmed. If someone else ever tried to use it, it would very likely burn out or kill him. But that had been just talk, just cover-up for his pig-headed selfishness.

Two weeks, Hart told himself. If he used his head he should be able to operate it without suspicion for at least two weeks. It would be easy. All he'd have to say was that Jasper had told him that he could borrow it any time he wished. And if he was any judge of character, Jasper would not be returning soon.

But even so, two weeks would be all the time he'd need. In two weeks, working day and night, he could turn out enough copy to enable Irving to buy himself a new machine.

He walked across the room to the yarner and pulled out the chair that stood in front of it. Calmly he sat down, reached out a hand and patted the instrument panel. It was a good machine. It turned out a lot of stuff—good stuff. Jasper had been selling steadily.

Good old yarner, Hart said.

He dropped his finger to the switch and flipped it over. Nothing happened. Startled, he flipped it back, flipped it on again. Still nothing happened.

He got up hastily to check the power connection. There was no power connection! For a shocked moment, he stood rooted to the floor.

Jiggered up, Jasper had said. Jiggered up so ingeniously that it could dispense with power?

It just wasn't possible. It was unthinkable. With fumbling fingers, he lifted the side panel, and peered inside.

The machine's innards were a mess. Half of the tubes were gone.

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Others were burned out, and the wiring had been ripped loose in places. The whole relay section was covered with dust. Some of the metal, he saw, was rusty. The entire machine was just a pile of junk.

He replaced the panel with suddenly shaking fingers, reeled back blindly and collided with a table. He clutched at it and held on tight to still the shaking of his hands, to steady the mad roaring in his head.

Jasper's machine wasn't jiggered up. It wasn't even in operating condition.

No wonder Jasper had kept his door locked. He lived in mortal fear that someone would find out that he wrote by hand!

And now, despite the dirty trick he'd played on a worthy friend, Hart was no better off than he had been before. He was faced with the same old problems, with no prospect of overcoming them. He still had his own beaten-up machine and nothing more. Maybe it would have been better if he had gone to Caph.

He walked to the door, paused there for an instant, and looked back. On the littered desk he could see Jasper's typewriter, carefully half-buried by the litter, and giving the exact impression that it was never used.

Still Jasper sold. Jasper sold almost every word he wrote. He sold —hunched over his desk with a pencil in his hand or hammering out the words on a muted typewriter. He sold without using the yarner at all, but keeping it all bright and polished, an empty, useless thing. He sold by using it as a shield against the banter and the disgust of all those others who talked so glibly and relied so much upon the metal and the magic of the ponderous contraption.

First it was told by mouth, Jasper had said that very evening. *Then it was writ by hand. Now it's fabricated by machine.*

And what's next, he'd asked—as if he had never doubted that there would be something next.

What next? thought Hart. Was this the end and all of Man—the moving gear, the clever glass and metal, the adroit electronics?

For the sake of Man's own dignity—his very sanity—there *had* to be a next. Mechanics, by their very nature, were a dead end. You could only get so clever. You could only go so far.

Jasper knew that. Jasper had found out. He had discarded the mechanistic aid and gone back to hand again.

Give a work of craftsmanship some economic value and Man would find a way to turn it out in quantity. Once furniture had been constructed lovingly by artisans who produced works of art that would last with pride through many generations. Then the machine had come and Man had turned out furniture that was purely function-

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al, furniture that had little lasting value and no pride at all.

And writing had followed the same pattern. It had pride no longer. It had ceased to be an art, and become a commodity.

But what was a man to do? What *could* he do? Lock his door like Jasper and work through lonely hours with the bitter taste of nonconformity sharp within his mind, tormenting him night and day?

Hart walked out of the room with a look of torment in his eyes. He waited for a second to hear the lock click home. Then he went down the hall and slowly climbed the stairs.

VII

THE ALIEN—the blanket and the face—was still lying on the bed. But now its eyes were open and it stared at him when he came in and closed the door behind him.

He stopped just inside the door and the cold mediocrity of the room—all of its meaness and its poverty—rose up to clog his nostrils. He was hungry, sick at heart and lonely, and the yarner in the corner seemed to mock at him.

Through the open window he could hear the rumble of a spaceship taking off across the river and the hooting of a tug as it warped a ship into a wharf.

He stumbled to the bed.

"Move over, you," he said to the wide-eyed alien, and tumbled down beside it. He turned his back to it and drew his knees up against his chest and lay huddled there.

He was right back where he'd started just the other morning. He still had no tape to do the job that Irving wanted. He still had a busted-up haywire machine. He was without a camera and he wondered where he could borrow one—although there would be no sense of borrowing one if he didn't have the money to pay a character. He'd tried once to take a film by stealth and he wouldn't try again. It wasn't worth the risk of going to prison for three or four years.

We love the wild and woolies, Green Shirt had said. *From them we get the going of far places.*

And while with Green Shirt it would be the bang-bangs and the wild and woolies, with some other race it would be a different type of fiction—race after race finding in this strange product of Earth a new world of enchantment. The far places of the mind, perhaps—or the far places of emotion. The basic differences were not too important.

Angela had said it was a lousy way to make a living. But she had only been letting off steam. All writers at times said approximately the same thing. In every age men and women of every known profession at some time must have said that theirs was a lousy way to make a living. At the moment they might have meant it, but at other times they knew that it was not lousy because it was important.

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And writing was important, too —tremendously important. Not so much because it meant the "going of far places," but because it sowed the seed of Earth—the seed of Earth's thinking and of Earth's logic—among the myriad stars.

They are out there waiting, Hart thought, for the stories that he would never write.

He would try, of course, despite all obstacles. He might even do as Jasper had done, scribbling madly with a sense of shame, feeling anachronistic and inadequate, dreading the day when someone would ferret out his secret, perhaps by deducing from a certain eccentricity of style that it was not machine-written.

For Jasper was wrong, of course. The trouble was not with the yarners nor with the principle of mechanistic writing. It was with Jasper himself—a deep psychopathic quirk that made a rebel of him. But even so he had remained a fearful and a hidden rebel who locked his door, and kept his yarner polished, and carefully covered his typewriter with the litter on his desk so no one would suspect that he ever used it.

Hart felt warmer now and he seemed to be no longer hungry and suddenly he thought of one of those far places that Green Shirt had talked about. It was a grove of trees and a brook ran through the grove. There was a sense of peace and calm and a touch of majesty and foreverness about it. He heard birdsong and smelled the sharp, spice-like scent of water running in its mossy banks. He walked among the trees and the Gothic shape of them made the place seem like a church. As he walked he formed words within his mind—words put together so feelingly and so rightly and so carefully that no one who read them could mistake what he had to say. They would know not only the sight of the grove itself, but the sound and the smell of it and the foreverness that filled it to overflowing.

But even in his exaltation he sensed a threat within the Gothic shape and the feeling of foreverness. Some lurking intuition told him that the grove was a place to get away from. He tried for a moment to remember how he had gotten there, but there was no memory. It was as if he had become familiar with the grove only a second or two before and yet he knew that he had been walking beneath the sun-dappled foliage for what must have been hours or days.

He felt a tingling on his throat and raised a hand to brush it off and his hand touched something small and warm that brought him upright out of bed.

His hand tightened on the creature's neck. He was about to rip it from his chest when suddenly he recalled, full-blown, the odd circumstance he had tried to remember just the night before.

His grip relaxed and he let his hand drop to his side. He stood be-

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side the bed, in the warm familiarity of the room, and felt the comfort of the blanket-creature upon his back and shoulders and around his throat.

He wasn't hungry and he wasn't tired and the sickness that he'd felt had somehow disappeared. He wasn't even worried and that was most unusual, for he was customarily worried.

Twelve hours before he had stood in the areaway with the blanket creature in his arms and had sought to pry out of a suddenly stubborn mind an explanation for the strange sense of recognition he'd experienced—the feeling that somewhere he had read or heard of the crying thing he'd found. Now, with it clasped around his back and clinging to his throat, he knew.

He strode across the room, with the blanket creature clinging to him, and took a book down from a narrow, six-foot shelf. It was an old and tattered book, worn smooth by many hands, and it almost slipped from his clasp as he turned it over to read the title on the spine: *Fragments from Lost Writings.*

He reversed the volume and began to leaf through its pages. He knew now where to find what he was looking for. He remembered exactly where he had read about the thing upon his back.

He found the pages quickly enough—a few salvaged paragraphs from some story written long ago and lost.

He skipped the first two pages, and came suddenly upon the paragraphs he wanted:

Ambitious vegetables, the life blankets waited, probably only obscurely aware of what they were waiting for. But when the humans came the long, long wait was over. The life blankets made a deal with men. And in the last analysis they turned out to be the greatest aid to galactic exploration that had ever been discovered.

And there it was, thought Hart—the old, smug, pat assurance that it would be the humans who would go into the galaxy to explore it and make contact with its denizens and carry to every planet they visited the virtues of the Earth.

With a life blanket draped like a bob-tailed cloak around his shoulders, a man had no need to worry about being fed, for the life blanket had the strange ability to gather energy and convert it into food for the body of its host.

It became, in fact, almost a second body—a watchful, fussy, quasi-parental body that watched over the body of its host, keeping metabolism in balance despite alien conditions, rooting out infections, playing the role of mother, cook and family doctor combined.

But in return the blanket became, in a sense, the double of its host. Shedding its humdrum vegetable existence, it became vicariously a man, sharing all of its host's emotions and intelligence, living the

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kind of life it never could have lived if left to itself.

And not content with this fair trade, the blankets threw in a bonus, a sort of dividend of gratitude. There were story tellers and imaginers. They could imagine anything—literally anything at all. They spent long hours spinning out tall yarns for the amusement of their hosts, serving as a shield against boredom and loneliness . . .

There was more of it, but Hart did not need to read on. He turned back to the beginning of the fragment and he read: *Author Unknown. Circa 1956.*

Six hundred years ago! Six hundred years—and how could any man in 1956 have known?

The answer was he couldn't.

There was no way he could have known. He'd simply *dreamed* it up. And hit the truth dead center! Some early writer of science fiction had had an inspired vision!

There was something coming through the grove and it was a thing of utter beauty. It was not humanoid and it was not a monster. It was something no man had ever seen before. And yet despite the beauty of it, there was a deadly danger in it and something one must flee from.

He turned around to flee and found himself in the center of the room.

"All right," he said to the blanket. "Let's cut it out for now. We can go back later."

We can go back later and we can make a story of it and we can go many other places and make stories of them, too. I won't need a yarner to write those kind of stories, for I can recapture the excitement and splendor of it, and link it all together better than a yarner could. I'll have been there and lived it, and that's a setup you can't beat.

And there it was! The answer to the question that Jasper had asked, sitting at the table in the Bright Star bar.

What next?

And this was next: a symbiosis between Man and an alien thing, imagined centuries ago by a man whose very name was lost.

It was almost, Hart thought, as if God had placed His hand against his back and propelled him gently onward, for it was utterly fantastic that he should have found the answer crying in an areaway between an apartment house and bindery.

But that did not matter now. The important thing was that he'd found it and brought it home—not quite knowing why at the time and wondering later why he had even bothered with it.

The important thing was that *now* was the big pay-off.

He heard footsteps coming up the stairs and turning down the hall. Alarmed by their rapid approach he reached up hastily and snatched the blanket from his shoulders. Frantically he looked about for a place to hide the creature. Of course! His desk. He

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jerked open the bottom drawer and stuffed the blanket into it, ignoring a slight resistance. He was kicking the drawer shut when Angela came into the room.

He could see at once that she was burned up.

"That was a lousy trick," she said. "You got Jasper into a lot of trouble."

Hart stared at her in consternation. "Trouble? You mean he didn't go to Caph."

"He's down in the basement hiding out. Blake told me he was there. I went down and talked to him."

"He got away from them?" Hart appeared badly shaken.

"Yes. He told them they didn't want a man at all. He told them what they wanted was a machine and he told them about that glittering wonder—that Classic model—in the shop uptown."

"And so they went and stole it."

"No. If they had it would have been all right. But they bungled it. They smashed the glass to get at it, and that set off an alarm. Every cop in town came tearing after them."

"But Jasper was all—"

"They took Jasper with them to show them where it was."

Some of the color had returned to Hart's face. "And now Jasper's hiding from the law."

"That's the really bad part of it. He doesn't know whether he is or not. He's not sure the cops even saw him. What he's afraid of is that they might pick up one of those Caphians and sweat the story out of him. And if they do, Kemp Hart, you have a lot to answer for."

"Me? Why, I didn't do a thing—"

"Except tell them that Jasper was the man they wanted. How did you ever make them believe a line like that?"

"Easy. Remember what Jasper said. Everyone else tells the truth. We're the only ones who lie. Until they get wise to us, they'll believe every word we say. Because, you see, no one else tells anything but the truth and so—"

"Oh, shut up!" Angela said impatiently.

She looked around the room. "Where's that blanket thing?" she asked.

"It must have left. Maybe it ran away. When I came home it wasn't here."

"Haven't you any idea what it was?"

Hart shook his head. "Maybe it's just as well it's gone," he said. "It gave me a queasy feeling."

"You and Doc!"

"That's another thing. This neighborhood's gone crazy. Doc is stretched out dead drunk under a tree in the park and there's an alien watching him. It won't let anyone come near him. It's as if it were guarding him, or had adopted him or something."

"Maybe it's one of Doc's pink elephants come to actual life. You

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know, dream a thing too often and—"

"It's no elephant and it isn't pink. It's got webbed feet that are too big for it and long, spindly legs. It's something like a spider, and its skin is warts. It has a triangular head with six horns. It fairly makes you crawl just to look at it."

Hart shuddered. Ordinary aliens could be all right, but a thing like that—

"Wonder what it wants of Doc."

"Nobody seems to know. It won't talk."

"Maybe it can't talk."

"You know all aliens talk. At least enough of our language to make themselves understood. Otherwise they wouldn't come here."

"It sounds reasonable," said Hart. "Maybe it's acquiring a second-hand jag just sitting there beside Doc."

"Sometimes," said Angela, "your sense of humor is positively disgusting."

"Like writing books by hand."

"Yes," she said. "Like writing books by hand. You know as well as I do that people just don't talk about writing anything by hand. It's like—well, it's like eating with your fingers or belching in public or going without clothes."

"All right," he said, "all right. I'll never mention it again."

VIII

AFTER she had left, Hart sat down and gave some serious thought to his situation.

In many ways he'd be a lot like Jasper, but he wouldn't mind if he could write as well as Jasper.

He'd have to start locking his door. He wondered where his key was. He never used it and now he'd have to look through his desk the first chance he got, to see if he couldn't locate it. If he couldn't find it he'd have to have a new key made, because he couldn't have people walking in on him unexpectedly and catching him wearing the blanket or writing stuff by hand.

Maybe, he thought, it might be a good idea to move. It would be hard at times to explain why all at once he had started to lock his door. But he hated the thought of moving. Bad as it was, he'd gotten used to this place and it seemed like home.

Maybe, after he started selling, he should talk with Angela and see how she felt about moving in with him. Angela was a good kid, but you couldn't ask a girl to move in with you when you were always wondering where the next meal was coming from. But now, even if he didn't sell, he'd never have to worry where his next meal was coming from. He wondered briefly if the blanket could be shared as a food provider by two persons and he wondered how in the world he'd ever manage to explain it all to Angela.

And how had that fellow back

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in 1956 ever thought of such a thing? How many of the other wild ideas concocted out of tortuous mental efforts and empty whiskey bottles might be true as well?

A dream? An idea? A glimmer of the future? It did not matter which, for a man had thought of it and it had come true. How many of the other things that Man had thought of in the past and would think of in the future would also become the truth?

The idea scared him.

That "going of far places." The reaching out of the imagination. The influence of the written word, the thought and power behind it. It was deadlier than a battleship, he'd said. How everlastingly right he had been.

He got up and walked across the room and stood in front of the yarner. It leered at him. He stuck out his tongue at it.

"That for you," he said.

Behind him he heard a rustle and hastily whirled about.

The blanket had somehow managed to ooze out of the desk drawer and it was heading for the door, reared upon the nether folds of its flimsy body. It was slithering along in a jerky fashion like a wounded seal.

"Hey, you!" yelled Hart and made a grab at it. But he was too late. A being—there was no other word for it—stood in the doorway and the blanket reached it and slithered swiftly up its body and plastered itself upon its back.

The thing in the doorway hissed at Hart: "I lose it. You are so kind to keep it. I am very grateful."

Hart stood transfixed.

The creature was a sight. Just like the one which Angela had seen guarding Doc, only possibly a little uglier. It had webbed feet that were three times too big for it, so that it seemed to be wearing snowshoes, and it had a tail that curved ungracefully halfway up its back. It had a melon-shaped head with a triangular face, and six horns and there were rotating eyes on the top of each and every horn.

The monstrosity dipped into a pouch that seemed to be part of its body, and took out a roll of bills.

"So small reward," it piped and tossed the bills to Hart.

Hart put out a hand and caught them absent-mindedly.

"We go now," said the being. "We think kind thoughts of you."

It had started to turn around, but at Hart's bellow of protest it swivelled back.

"Yes, good sir."

"This blanket—this thing I found. What about it?"

"We make it."

"But it's alive and—"

The thing grinned a murderous grin. "You so clever people. You think it up. Many times ago."

"That story!"

"Quite so. We read of it. We make it. Very good idea."

"You can't mean you actually—"

"We biologist. What you call them—biologic engineers."

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It turned about and started down the hall.

Hart howled after it. "Just a minute! Hold up there! Just a min—"

But it was going fast and it didn't stop. Hart thundered after it. When he reached the head of the stairs and glanced down it was out of sight. But he raced after it, taking the stairs three at a time in defiance of all the laws of safety.

He didn't catch it. In the street outside he pulled to a halt and looked in all directions but there was no sign of it. It had completely disappeared.

He reached into his pocket and felt the roll of bills he had caught on the fly. He pulled the roll out and it was bigger than he remembered it. He snapped off the rubber band, and examined a few of the bills separately. The denomination on the top bill, in galactic credits, was so big it staggered him. He riffled through the entire sheaf of bills and all the denominations seemed to be the same.

He gasped at the thought of it, and riffled through them once again. He had been right the first time—all the denominations *were* the same. He did a bit of rapid calculation and it was strictly unbelievable. In credits, too—and a credit was convertible, roughly, into five Earth dollars.

He had seen credits before, but never actually held one in his hand. They were the currency of galactic trade and were widely used in interstellar banking circles, but seldom drifted down into general circulation. He held them in his hand and took a good look at them and they sure were beautiful.

The being must have immeasurably prized that blanket, he thought—to give him such a fabulous sum simply for taking care of it. Although, when you came to think of it, it wasn't necessarily so. Standards of wealth differed greatly from one planet to another and the fortune he held in his hands might have been little more than pocket money to the blanket's owner.

He was surprised to find that he wasn't too thrilled or happy, as he should have been. All he seemed to be able to think about was that he'd lost the blanket.

He thrust the bills into his pocket and walked across the street to the little park. Doc was awake and sitting on a bench underneath a tree. Hart sat down beside him.

"How you feeling, Doc?" he asked.

"I'm feeling all right, son," the old man replied.

"Did you see an alien, like a spider wearing snowshoes?"

"There was one of them here just a while ago. It was here when I woke up. It wanted to know about that thing you'd found."

"And you told it."

"Sure. Why not? It said it was hunting for it. I figured you'd be glad to get it off your hands."

The two of them sat silently for a while.

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Then Hart asked: "Doc, what would you do if you had about a billion bucks?"

"Me," said Doc, without the slightest hesitation, "I'd drink myself to death. Yes, sir, I'd drink myself to death real fancy, not on any of this rotgut they sell in this end of town."

And that was the way it went, thought Hart. Doc would drink himself to death. Angela would go in for arty salons and the latest styles. Jasper more than likely would buy a place out in the mountains where he could be away from people.

And me, thought Hart, what will I do with a billion bucks—take or give a million?

Yesterday, last night, up until a couple of hours ago, he would have traded in his soul on the Classic yarner.

But now it seemed all sour and off-beat.

For there was a better way—the way of symbiosis, the teaming up of Man and an alien biologic concept.

He remembered the grove with its Gothic trees and its sense of foreverness and even yet, in the brightness of the sun, he shivered at the thought of the thing of beauty that had appeared among the trees.

That was, he told himself, a surely better way to write—to know the thing yourself and write it, to live the yarn and write it.

But he had lost the blanket and he didn't know where to find another. He didn't even know, if he found the place they came from, what he'd have to do to capture it.

An alien biologic concept, and yet not entirely alien, for it had first been thought of by an unknown man six centuries before. A man who had written as Jasper wrote even in this day, hunched above a table, scribbling out the words he put together in his brain. No yarner there—no tapes, no films, none of the other gadgets. But even so that unknown man had reached across the mists of time and space to touch another unknown mind and the life blanket had come alive as surely as if Man himself had made it.

And was that the true greatness of the human race—that they could imagine something and in time it would be so?

And if that were the greatness, could Man afford to delegate it to the turning shaft, the spinning wheel, the clever tubes, the innards of machines?

"You wouldn't happen," asked Doc, "to have a dollar on you?"

"No," said Hart, "I haven't got a dollar."

"You're just like the rest of us," said Doc. "You dream about the billions and you haven't got a dime."

Jasper was a rebel and it wasn't worth it. All the rebels ever got were the bloody noses and the broken heads.

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"I sure could use a buck," said Doc.

It wasn't worth it to Jasper Hansen and it wasn't worth it to the others who must also lock their doors and polish up their never-used machines, so that when someone happened to drop in they'd see them standing there.

And it isn't worth it to me, Kemp Hart told himself. Not when by continuing to conform he could become famous almost automatically and virtually overnight.

He put his hand into his pocket and felt the roll of bills and knew that in just a little while he'd go uptown and buy that wonderful machine. There was plenty in the roll to buy it. With what there was in that roll he could buy a shipload of them.

"Yes, sir," said Doc harking back to his answer to the billion dollar question. "It would be a pleasant death. A pleasant death, indeed."

IX

A GANG of workmen were replacing the broken window when Hart arrived at the uptown showroom, but he scarcely more than glanced at them and walked straight inside.

The same salesman seemed to materialize from thin air.

But he wasn't happy. His expression was stern and a little pained.

"You've come back, no doubt," he said, "to place an order for the Classic."

"That is right," said Hart and pulled the roll out of his pocket.

The salesman was well-trained. He stood wall-eyed for just a second, then recovered his composure with a speed which must have set a record.

"That's fine," he said. "I knew you'd be back. I was telling some of the other men this morning that you would be coming in."

I just bet you were, thought Hart.

"I suppose," he said, "that if I paid you cash you would consider throwing in a rather generous supply of tapes and films and some of the other stuff I need."

"Certainly, sir. I'll do the best I can for you."

Hart peeled off twenty-five thousand and put the rest back in his pocket.

"Won't you have a seat," the salesman urged. "I'll be right back. I'll arrange delivery and fix up the guarantee . . ."

"Take your time," Hart told him, enjoying every minute of it.

He sat down in a chair and did a little planning.

First he'd have to move to better quarters and as soon as he had moved he'd have a dinner for the crowd and he'd rub Jasper's nose in it. He'd certainly do it—if Jasper wasn't tucked away in jail. He chuckled to himself, thinking of Jasper cringing in the basement of the Bright Star bar.

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And this very afternoon he'd go over to Irving's office and pay him back the twenty and explain how it was he couldn't find the time to write the stuff he wanted.

Not that he wouldn't have liked to help Irving out. But it would be sacrilege to write the kind of junk that Irving wanted on a machine as talented as the Classic.

He heard footsteps coming hurriedly across the floor behind him and he stood up and turned around, smiling at the salesman.

But the salesman wasn't smiling. He was close to apoplexy.

"You!" said the salesman, choking just a little in his attempt to remain a gentleman. "That money! We've had enough from you, young man."

"The money," said Hart. "Why, it's galactic credits. It—"

"It's play money," stormed the salesman. "Money for the kids. Play money from the Draconian federation. It says so, right on the face of it. In those big characters."

He handed Hart the money.

"Get out of here!" the salesman shouted.

"But," Hart pleaded, "are you sure? It can't be! You must be mistaken—"

"Our teller says it is. He has to be an expert on all sorts of money and he *says it is!*"

"But you took it. You couldn't tell the difference."

"I can't read Draconian. But the teller can."

"That damn alien!" shouted Hart in sudden fury. "Just let me get my hands on him!"

The salesman softened just a little.

"You can't trust those aliens, sir. They are a sneaky lot."

"Get out of my way," Hart shouted. "I've got to find that alien!"

The man at the Alien bureau wasn't very helpful.

"We have no record," he told Hart, "of the kind of creature you describe. You wouldn't have a photo of it, would you?"

"No," said Hart, "I haven't got a photo."

The man started piling up the catalogs he had been looking through.

"Of course," he said, "the fact we have no record of him doesn't mean a thing. Admittedly, we can't keep track of all the various people. There are so many of them and new ones all the time. Perhaps you might inquire at the spaceport. Someone might have seen your alien."

"I've already done that. Nothing. Nothing at all. He must have come in and possibly have gone back, but no one can remember him. Or maybe they won't tell."

"The aliens hang together," said the man. "They don't tell you nothing."

He went on stacking up the books. It was near to quitting time and he was anxious to be off.

The man said, jokingly, "You

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might go out in space and try to hunt him up."

"I might do just that," said Hart and left, slamming the door behind him.

Joke: You might go out in space and find him. You might go out and track him across ten thousand light years and among a million stars. And when you found him you might say I want to have a blanket and he'd laugh right in your face.

But by the time you'd tracked him across ten thousand light years and among a million stars you'd no longer need a blanket, for you would have lived your stories and you would have seen your characters and you would have absorbed ten thousand backgrounds and a million atmospheres.

And you'd need no yarner and no tapes and films, for the words would be pulsing at your fingertips and pounding in your brain, shrieking to get out.

Joke: Toss a backwoods yokel a fistful of play money for something worth a million. The fool wouldn't know the difference until he tried to spend it. Be a big shot cheap and then go off in a corner by yourself and die laughing at how superior you are.

And who had it been that said humans were the only liars?

Joke: Wear a blanket round your shoulders and send your ships to Earth for the drivel that they write there—never knowing, never guessing that you have upon your back the very thing that's needed to break Earth's monopoly of fiction.

And that, said Hart, is a joke on you.

If I ever find you, I'll cram it down your throat.

X

ANGELA came up the stairs bearing an offering of peace. She set the kettle on the table. "Some soup," she said. "I'm good at making soup."

"Thanks, Angela," he said. "I forgot to eat today."

"Why the knapsack, Kemp? Going on a hike?"

"No, going on vacation."

"But you didn't tell me."

"I just now made up my mind to go. A little while ago."

"I'm sorry I was so angry at you. It turned out all right. Green Shirt and his gang made their getaway."

"So Jasper can come out."

"He's already out. He's plenty sore at you."

"That's all right with me. I'm no pal of his."

She sat down in a chair and watched him pack.

"Where are you going, Kemp?"

"I'm hunting for an alien."

"Here in the city? Kemp, you'll never find him."

"Not in the city. I'll have to ask around."

"But there aren't any aliens—"

"That's right."

"You're a crazy fool," she cried.

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"You can't do it, Kemp. I won't let you. How will you live? What will you do?"

"I'll write."

"Write? You can't write! Not without a yarner."

"I'll write by hand. Indecent as it may be, I'll write by hand because I'll know the things I write about. It'll be in my blood and at my fingertips. I'll have the smell of it and the color of it and the taste of it!"

She leaped from the chair and beat at his chest with tiny fists.

"It's filthy! It's uncivilized! It's—"

"That's the way they wrote before. All the millions of stories, all the great ideas, all the phrases that you love to quote. And that is the way it should have stayed. This is a dead-end street we're on."

"You'll come back," she said. "You'll find that you are wrong and you'll come back."

He shook his head at her. "Not until I find my alien."

"It isn't any alien you are after. It is something else. I can see it in you."

She whirled around and raced out the door and down the stairs.

He went back to his packing and when he had finished, he sat down and ate the soup. Angela, he thought, was right. She was good at making soup.

And she was right in another thing as well. It was no alien he was seeking.

For he didn't need an alien. And he didn't need a blanket and he didn't need a yarner.

He took the kettle to the sink and washed it beneath the tap and dried it carefully. Then he set it in the center of the table where Angela, when she came, would be sure to see it.

Then he took up the knapsack and started slowly down the stairs.

He had reached the street when he heard the cry behind him. It was Angela and she was running after him. He stopped and waited for her.

"I'm going with you, Kemp."

"You don't know what you're saying. It'll be rough and hard. Strange lands and alien people. And we haven't any money."

"Yes, we have. We have that fifty. The one I tried to loan you. It's all I have and it won't go far, I know. But we have it."

"You're looking for no alien."

"Yes, I am. I'm looking for an alien, too. All of us, I think, are looking for your alien."

He reached out an arm and swept her roughly to him, held her close against him.

"Thank you, Angela," he said.

Hand in hand they headed for the spaceport, looking for a ship that would take them to the stars.

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the robot carpenter

by . . . Frank B. Bryning

"Can Honor's voice provoke the silent dust?" asked Thomas Gray. From the grave's deep silence a robot dared proclaim: "It can!"

WITH A SLOW, wondering shake of his head, the tall young man in the one-piece flying suit read the epitaph for the third time.

HERE LIE THE REMAINS OF JOHN SMITH, KNOWN AS THE ROBOT CARPENTER, AND ALSO AS MPR 15, WHO WAS NOT BORN OF WOMAN BUT WAS MADE OF MAN. YET HE WAS A BETTER MAN THAN MANY ANOTHER OF WHOM IT COULD BE SAID: "GOD MADE HIM, AND THEREFORE LET HIM PASS FOR A MAN"

"Everyone was sorry when he died," volunteered the clergyman standing beside him.

"'Died'?" echoed the airman. "A robot!"

"Suicided—I should have said."

"That's even harder to accept—unless 'Robot Carpenter' applies to a human being who was, for some reason, thought to resemble a robot?"

"He was a robot truly enough. The inscription is accurate in saying 'not born of woman,' although I am not keen on that last part

Frank B. Bryning has written so many brilliant documentary-type science fiction stories for us that we were quite sure he'd surprise us eventually with a narrative departure such as this. Very gifted writers seldom ride just one "Chariot of the Sun," and here Mr. Bryning has succeeded in moving us profoundly with a warmth and a splendor and a human compassion almost too deep for tears. John Smith may be buried, but you'll never, never forget him.

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which implies that he was better than some of God's handiwork! But the late John Smith was, in truth, a man-made machine with an electronic brain."

"How then—?"

"He was humanoid in form, metal-skinned, with two arms and two legs. His hands were made rather like God's design for human hands, yet with a number of specialized variations which were presumed to make them better hands for carpentering."

"And were they?"

"Possibly. Certain it is that, provided he used his own kit of tools, with their special grips for his metal fingers, he out-classed any human carpenter in the speed and precision of his work. But with an ordinary carpenter's kit, made for hands of flesh to grip, his metal fingers would slip unless he gripped so tightly that he bruised the wooden handles. In such circumstances he was still an expert carpenter, although slower and fumbling."

"How did he happen to be made? We never heard of robot carpenters before the War."

"World Robots produced him as a laboratory experiment in the direction of a multi-purpose robot —although his 'manifold' purposes were to be specialized within the field of carpentry. He was given almost human attributes, such mental processes as were necessary for him to understand what might be required of him. He had to read and write and calculate, so as to be able to work from plans, to be able to 'get along' with human beings with whom he might have to work, and to be able to learn new things, and apply them."

"Something near the bill for a complete mind, I should say."

"Apparently they found that out after they made him," agreed the padre. "Most robots, as you know, were fairly narrow specialists in one thing or another. It is usually more efficient to have a separate mechanism for each distinct purpose. But for this one they evidently had to make a mind almost as complete as a human mind, in order to meet the requirements. Or, to say it the other way around, when they made his mind capable of meeting those requirements it turned out to be of caliber good enough to do most other things."

"Strange we never heard of him before the 'blow-up.' He must have been completed then."

"Years before. And he was a great success, functionally. But they never put his type into production because they couldn't see their way through the labor relations problems. You will remember how touchy things were in that field in the years before war broke out! It was regarded as certain that human carpenters, joiners, furniture makers, cabinet makers, and others would see in robot artisans such a threat to themselves that real upheaval would result.

"So he was stored with a num-

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ber of other experiments while they tried to work out the implications of the problem or find other fields of work where they would not run up against the same difficulties."

"What about the dangerous trades—explosives, chemicals, atomics?"

"I believe they were exploring such possibilities when the War began. But metal bodies, fingers, and feet are hazardous in explosives, and of poor survival value amid chemicals. And radio-activity can make an electronic brain just as sick as it makes a body and brain of flesh and blood. They had no solution before the War put a stop to their work.

"And then, of course," supplemented the airman, "organized society in large communities ceased to exist after a few weeks—and large scale industry, too."

"Yes. Since then history has been of our beginning again in little communities like this one, with people like yourself working on communications to link us up." The padre smiled wryly and gestured towards the headstone. "Yet John Smith *could* enter this type of society without disrupting its economic relationships. Indeed, since skilled artisans are at a premium in small communities where there is no industrialization, he could become a tremendous asset. And so he did for us. He came to us in a time of great need for such as he. Or rather, we sent for him, as it were."

"*Sent* for him?" he asked.

"It was this way. You realize, of course, that this village was almost untouched by the bombing, although the big industrial city of Richwood, forty miles away, was devastated. World Robots had their big factory and experimental laboratories on its outksirts. It was our experience that after the blow-up the population of our village increased rather rapidly for a time by the influx of refugees and stragglers who had, for one reason or another, escaped death in the cities or were out of town when the bombing occurred. They had to find some place to anchor themselves again. I suppose much the same thing happened elsewhere?"

"It did," the airman agreed. "There were many conflicts and uneasy solutions, and upsets to peaceful small-town existence as a result. In some cases small villages were ravaged and looted. Others were occupied by strangers to the eviction and exclusion of most of their original inhabitants."

"We escaped most of that sort of thing, thank God!" the clergyman testified. "We are pretty well isolated here, and Richwood was the only real city within three hundred miles in any direction. We managed to absorb our refugees without any serious upsets. Our immediate needs were to increase our food supplies, and next in importance was our housing. We put most of our newcomers as well as the biggest percentage of our own

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people on to the business of growing, tending, hunting, and foraging food. House building took most of the others. Clothes had to come a bad third."

"It seems anomalous that there should be a housing shortage anywhere in a country that had lost more than half its population overnight," commented the airman. "Yet it had to be so when the cities were no longer habitable."

"It was so with us, and with other small communities, no doubt, who had to accommodate a sudden increase of refugees. Our few artisans in the trades of building, plumbing, and furniture making were hopelessly overtaxed. That was why we could welcome John Smith."

"Surely he was not a refugee!"

"By no means. But the idea came from one of our refugees who was assisting in the building work. He had been a plant maintenance man and caretaker in the World Robots plant. He knew of 'Multi-purpose Robot Fifteen' which they had made and stored away. He proposed that he should go back and retrieve MPR Fifteen if it were not destroyed. He thought it likely that the underground store-rooms might be undamaged.

"So he and a companion walked the forty miles to the ruined city, in the outskirts of which were the remains of World Robots' plant. They found MPR Fifteen intact. Their greatest difficulty was in digging through the rubble in another part of the plant to get an electronic battery for him. This took them two extra days, but they were back here in exactly one week, with MPR Fifteen striding between them, carrying his two kits of tools like suitcases, and conversing gravely in impeccable English."

The airman smiled. "So he became a village artisan. But how did he come to be buried here with such honor as this epitaph accords him?"

"Let us sit down," said the padre as he led the way to the porch of the church. "MPR Fifteen became a tower of strength immediately in our little community," he continued as they sat down on the steps. "His energy was enormous, and with his virtually inexhaustible electronic battery he was tireless. As a carpenter he could do the work of about six men each day. In our most acute period he insisted on working twenty-four hours a day, stopping only every six hours for a few minutes to top up his lubrication reservoir.

"He was incredibly accurate, and so positive in his every act that he never had to go over anything a second time. When he was on a house framing job and required some assistance at the other end of long timbers, it was all that two men could do to keep up with him. When he was nailing floorings it was almost as if a sewing machine were stitching them."

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"I was told, in the village," said the airman, "that the end joints of his fingers could be used as nail sets. I didn't really believe—"

"The little finger and the index finger of his left hand," qualified the padre. "He could extend a tapered point from either of these fingers as easily as a cat puts out its claws. He would touch two nail-heads at once with them, tap the back of his hand once with his hammer, and the nail-heads would be neatly set an eighth of an inch or whatever he required below the surface of the timber."

"I see," said the airman. "Tools were built into him like specialized robot typ—"

"Some, but not so many as you might expect," replied the padre. "Remember, he was a multi-purpose robot, and was conceived as a user of tools rather than as a sort of super multi-bladed pocketknife. His feet were made exactly twelve inches long and six inches across the front. The inner edges and the front edges made perfect right angles. The outer edges sloped back from the front at perfect sixty-degree angles. The three sides of each foot were calibrated. The heels were perfectly circular, three inches in diameter, and calibrated in degrees of a circle. At the center of the back of the heel where the tapering sides of the foot would have met in a thirty degree angle, there was a deep cleft to mark the point.

"The hands were primarily gripping hands, with the end thumb joint a perfect inch measure. Thumb-tip to little finger-tip, extended and locked, was exactly twelve inches—and so forth. His forearms, from wrist to elbow, measured exactly eighteen inches, and were calibrated in inches. The straight edge of his left forearm was his most used rule. His wrists could be locked rigidly in right angles, and so could his elbows. Inset between his left wrist and elbow was a calibrated channel with a vernier scale that made his forearm a slide rule."

The padre stopped himself, for the airman, marvelling, was shaking his head slowly once more.

"I can't imagine just why he wasn't made with six or eight limbs—one a power drill, one a saw, one a—"

"He had all those in his tool kit—saws, drills, screwdrivers, nailers, staplers, riveters, grinders, sanders, and so on," explained the padre. "But you must remember that if he had had all those specialized limbs, only one would have been usable at a time—or at the most, two. The rest would have been not only idle, but also encumbrances. As it was, his were the only power hand tools usable in the village since our electricity production had ceased. All were plugged into his own energy supply in a socket approximately in the vicinity of what would have been his navel, had he been born of woman."

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The young man laughed softly.

"That, surely," he said, "was a little bit of whimsy on his designers' part!"

"Who knows? Yet it was a very logical location. Each tool operated from the same short spiral flex that coiled close to John Smith's —ah—'solar plexus', if I may use the term. It would extend or coil down as he used the tool at arm's length or close to his body. In all his actions he could bring to bear a delicacy of touch superior to that of the finest watchmaker—or a strength that was tremendous. In situations where, for instance, a cramp would normally be needed, the grip of his hand, or pressure between his arm and his side, his hand and his hip, or knee and knee, was sufficient. And, being quickly applied and relinquished, these grips saved an enormous amount of time as he worked."

"I can imagine that he would wear out, in time—possibly in a rather short time if he kept going twenty-four hours a day," remarked the airman. "But I don't see how the term 'dying' can properly apply to him in any circumstances."

"I suppose that was because we all came to regard him as a personality more or less like any other of us. We came to recognize him as a being—and a citizen—rather than a mechanical device, or a machine. And he seemed to want it that way—to be one of us—to identify himself with us as a group. It was probably why he selected the most common of all names, John Smith, and asked us to call him that, instead of his factory serial number, MPR Fifteen.

"It was rather remarkable, I admit. Yet having had a lot to do with him, I can see that it was inevitable. It is to be explained, I fancy, by what I mentioned before. To give his electronic brain the capacities it needed for him to function properly as a carpenter, to apply his built-in abilities with discretion, to understand plans and work from them, to be able to investigate and learn, was also to give him reason, and something like curiosity, too.

"It had to mean giving him understanding of the why and wherefore of the work he was to do. It meant he had to have an appreciation of the difference between good work and bad, a satisfaction in the one and a distaste, or antipathy, or dissatisfaction with the other. He had to be able to recognize merit and demerit—good and bad—in his work, and in the results which would flow from it. I believe, in giving him this, he was inevitably given the means of distinguishing between good and evil, wherever they be found."

"Within his limited frame of reference," qualified the airman.

"Which appeared to be no less capable of extension than yours or mine," added the padre. "He certainly widened his frame of reference very rapidly! He was a keen

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observer—and critic—of human behavior. He read a great deal, spending most of the time we spent sleeping, first with my books, both sacred and secular, then in our Municipal Library. After that he read everything in the library of my good friend McQueen, the stonemason, who is, incidentally, a freethinker. He has a most comprehensive collection of volumes, including the only Encyclopedia Britannica in the village."

"Stonemason?" repeated the airman. "Was it he who lettered that headstone?"

"The same," acknowledged the padre, "and a fine, good man he is, despite his unbelief. John Smith spent even more of his time with him than with me—reading and talking."

"And was McQueen responsible for the wording of the epitaph—or the last part of it?"

"He was. I can see him smiling at me through it whenever I read it. It upset my vestry right at the start, and I had a lot of trouble to prevent them removing it from the graveyard, and John Smith's remains as well."

"You justified the wording to them?"

"I could hardly do that. But I did insist on McQueen's right as John Smith's friend to place his own kind of tribute with the remains, just as I insisted on my own right as his friend to grant him burial here as he had requested."

The padre gave a sudden bright smile. "They gave in. Their power is not what it was, since replacements are not to be found, nowadays, for positions like mine. Besides, I could find no positive untruth in that epitaph—and neither could they!"

"Do you think, then, that John Smith had anything more than the mechanical ability to think—anything more than the 'mind,' if we can call it that, of a computer?"

"A soul? Not what we call a soul—God-given. No. But I think it did follow from his ability to distinguish good from bad in most things that he came to accept our recognition that what is wholesome for us as a social group is good, and that what is 'unsocial' is bad. In short, he acquired what McQueen calls a 'social conscience.' Something of the sort he undoubtedly had, and to a degree no less than the best of us, as his sacrifices for others testify."

"Sacrifices?"

The padre lifted his chin, and nodded once, emphatically.

"I should say 'heroic' sacrifices.

"The first one occurred when he was at work with a team of building tradesmen on our school extension. A concrete lintel began to give way, and the brickwork above it began to sag. John Smith was the first to detect it, and he promptly stood beneath the lintel, supporting it with his metal limbs. He locked his elbows, shoulder sockets, hips, and knees, to make of himself a single metal support.

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"He held the sagging lintel, and in his always unemotional voice, loudly called all the men off the scaffolds. He stayed where he was until the last of them had scrambled down and run out beneath the lintel. When they were all clear he suddenly withdrew, at top speed —that is, he intended to . . .

"In actual fact his strained joints functioned imperfectly for the first time in his existence. He had been subjected to a strain greater than he had been built for. His legs and arms had become bowed. As a result the elbow, shoulder, hips, and knee joints were strained slightly out of their proper alignment. He was slower in action than his electronic brain anticipated. He was battered to his knees by an avalanche of bricks before he could get clear.

"Although he struggled up and got out to safety in a few seconds, he emerged as a distinctly rickety and gangling contraption compared with the finely integrated precision mechanism he had been."

"Presumably," suggested the airman, "he could be repaired?"

"Some blacksmithing straightened his bowed limbs, and our garage panel-beater took the dents out of his carapace and cranium. But always, after that, John Smith was what he called 'ailing.' His strained joints were never quite right again. The tempering of his legs and arms was never brought back quite to what it should have been. The fine accuracy of his fore-arm straight-edges, and his slide-rule was impaired. And his brain mechanism had been jarred badly enough to malfunction occasionally.

"For the first time in his experience he began to make occasional mistakes in calculation. He began to do inaccurate work with the saw, or drill, or plane. He would sometimes mishit nails—even miss completely, now and then. It seems a queer thing to say, but he became as fallible as a human carpenter—even to hitting his own thumb once or twice!

" 'I have become unreliable,' he complained to me. 'I am becoming unworthy to work amongst men.'

" 'You mean you are becoming more like men,' I answered, somewhat flippantly, perhaps, but I was trying to make light of his worries. For worried he was, I knew, despite his entire lack of facial expression to indicate it. But it was no use.

" 'I am becoming a danger to those I work with,' he persisted. 'Yesterday I dropped my saw from the rafters, and it fell within inches of my colleague Arthur Simpson, on the floor below. Two days before that my hammer flew from my hand and broke a window pane.'

"I tried to reassure him, but he was too logical.

" 'It is possible for a human being, a man of flesh and blood, to repair himself by rest and the regeneration of his tissues,' he said. 'But not for such as I am. I have to be operated on, you might say,

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and have my worn parts replaced or repaired. And the metallurgy to do that properly for, say, my bearings, cannot be undertaken in a village smithy. It would require such resources as those in the plant where I was made . . . All that is finished now.'

"I ventured to suggest that there might be stocks of spare parts at the plant, even then.

" 'Not for me,' he replied. 'I am the experimental prototype, not one of a model in production. I shall either wear out or break down eventually.'

" 'Well,' I said, in the hope of cheering him up, 'you are not seriously impaired even if you have no longer the perfection you once had. You are, if I may say so, more human—and for just the reason that you are now prone to occasional lapses as we humans are. Such minor accidents as you describe are happening with us all the time.' "

The padre shrugged his shoulders, and stared silently across the little graveyard for a few moments.

"Within another week, however, things were much worse. There was a fire which burnt out our hospital, and in the course of which John Smith proved himself to be nothing less than a hero. That there was no loss of life was entirely due to him. To the last he went in and out through the heat that would have killed any man, bringing out the patients, wrapped in their own bedding. On his final trip, carrying a brave young nurse enveloped in blankets and mattress, he fell through the burning staircase into the heart of the fire on the ground floor.

"A great shout went up as we all thought they were gone. But even as I began to pray, John Smith was seen to stagger to his feet, clasping his now burning bundle, and to plow his way through the flames.

"They played their hoses on him and he emerged from the fire in a cloud of hissing steam and smoke, to totter and fall on his back at the edge of the lawn where the heat was just bearable to us. His charred and smouldering burden fell open like a split banana, and out rolled the nurse, singed and half-suffocated, but otherwise unharmed.

"With the best intentions they turned their hoses on John Smith again, but at the first touch of the water he leapt to his feet.

" 'Do not put water on me!' he roared, and blundered away into the garden. 'Let me cool in my own time!'

"I followed him and found him pacing back and forth in a corner of the garden, still near enough to receive some warmth from the fire, swinging his arms gently, flexing his fingers, and rolling his head about on his neck.

" 'Are you all right, John? I asked anxiously. It was the usual foolish question one does ask on such occasions. Then I made it

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worse. 'Do you feel— I mean, are you hurt—injured? Can I do anything for you?'

"'Ha! Ha!' he said, for he had no laughter, and had long since adopted this method of revealing amusement. 'Do I feel? Am I hurt? It is hard to say, Padre, and hard for you to ask without using the terms which apply to flesh and blood, is it not? How can I answer, except in the same terms?'

"'Do you *think,* then, that you will be all right?' I persisted.

"'I do not know, Padre,' he replied. 'I have experienced heat and cold before, but never such heat as this time. I am aware of the extra activity of the molecules of my heated metal—and even in the very functioning parts and components of my brain. My mind is functioning correctly, I think. I am what you might call "fevered" all over —and in my head, too. My hope is that all my parts will cool evenly back to their former sizes, tempers, adjustments—and balance. Yet I fear that may be too much to expect.'"

"I should think it hardly possible," said the airman.

"It *was* too much to expect. By the time he had cooled down the splendid machine that had been MPR Fifteen and known as John Smith, the Robot Carpenter, was no longer splendid. It was crippled, if I may put it that way, both physically and mentally.

"We did our best for him. The blacksmith and the garage man got his arms and legs and neck working again, and properly self-lubricating. With panel-beating, riveting, and polishing, they made him presentable. But we had no electronic engineers, and no robot brain experts, so we could not attempt to mend his mind.

"He had become what we can only call mentally deranged, or— aberrated—or—"

"Irresponsible?" offered the airman, as the padre paused for a word.

"No! Not irresponsible! He was never that—least of all at the last.

"He tried to do his work as a carpenter again, but it was hopeless. He sawed and hammered and drilled, but he made nothing except disconnected fragments— mitres, tenons, a misshapen window frame, clapboard sidings nailed to flooring joists, and such like. In a lucid moment he looked upon a pile of this futility, and raised his hammer as if to smash it all with one blow. Then he dropped the tool, turned his back on it all, and went away.

"I saw him on his way through the village. Anyone who had not known him would have thought him intoxicated. He reeled like a drunken man. In the main street he fell on his face between two children, knocking one down—a little girl. The mother's scream of terror was harrowing to hear.

"John Smith got to his feet and apologized gravely to the children, who didn't seem to mind—they all

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knew and liked him—and to the mother, who was still shaking with fear when I reached them. I took his arm and we came here to the church and sat on these steps as you and I are sitting now. He reminded me then that I had promised him that when 'his time came' he might be buried in this churchyard.

"'Of course I remember, John,' I told him. 'But you don't have to think about that yet. You've got plenty of time ahead of you. And we might find a robot brain expert yet—'

"'I think not,' he replied unemotionally. 'And I have become a danger to people. I know what I must do.'

"I tried my best to reassure him, and I thought I had succeeded for the time being. He asked if he might sit in the church for a while—and think it out. I left him there, as I had done many an evening before. He would always let himself out through the vestry, and close the door carefully behind him.

"We found him next morning, in a heap on this path. He had gone up to the belfry and dived on to that flagstone . . . You can see where it is cracked. He had smashed his head completely."

The airman had risen and gone to the flagstone, where he was tracing the crack with the toe of his shoe.

"Then you, too, consider he had developed a social conscience?" he said. "You believe he destroyed himself for the sake of the people he had learned to 'live' amongst—for the sake of the better survival of his social group. Is that it?"

"We think so, most of us," acknowledged the padre. "McQueen insists that it is so. 'Greater love hath no man than this . . .' he quoted at me at the time. But of course he is committed to the view that moral codes derive from social necessity rather than divine injunction."

"And why did John Smith want to be buried in your churchyard? Did he give a reason?"

"None. McQueen says it proves he had a sense of humor. But that is just his way of teasing me. I imagine John Smith wanted to think that he would always be one of us. He wanted to identify himself with us as completely as possible, for some reason. He did not want to think that he would be cast out, as it were, or, literally thrown on a junk heap, after he wore out.

"At all events, I couldn't refuse him, since he *had* become, quite definitely, one of us—and even quite dear to us. Moreover, I could never forget what he said on the occasion he asked if he might join my congregation."

"I don't think you have told me that."

"No." The padre was smiling wistfully. "I cannot think with any pleasure of my rather lame attempts to point out that he could not be, in any real sense, one *with*

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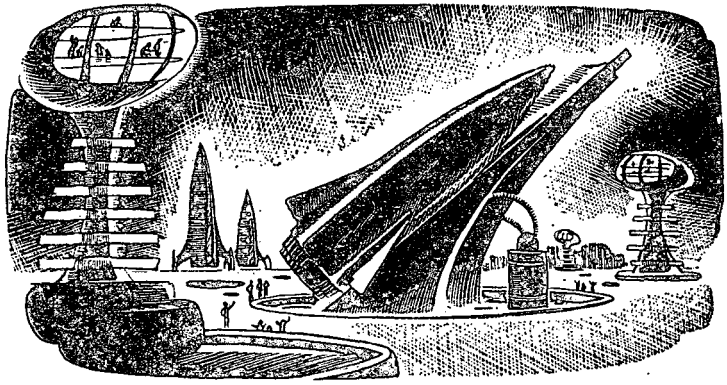
us . . . that the Creator had not, apparently, made any provision for the salvation of—well—man-made mechanisms which had not been vouchsafed souls. I was trying not to put it baldly, or to appear to be claiming superiority.

"But John Smith was without the power to feel rancor. And you must bear in mind that his voice had no inflections or intonations which could impart an emotional tone to his words. So I cannot say he did not intend to be proud, or sardonic, or pleading, or whatever you may care to impute. My own opinion, though, is that he spoke with reverence and humility. At all events he said, simply and directly, stating the fact:

" 'After all, He was a carpenter, too, was He not?' "



Among the Contributors to Next Month's Exciting Issue will be

JAMES E. GUNN, *with* "The Big Wheel"
RALPH A. BENNETT, *with* "Satan and the Comrades"
JACK VANCE, *with* "Where the Hesperus Falls"
MELVIN STURGIS, *with* "The Unprotected Species"
FREDERIK POHL, *with* "The Celebrated No-Hit Inning"

and many others

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attack from within

by . . . Burton Crane

To be a secret agent in a future torn by strife takes a great deal of technical know-how — and a courage that outshines the stars.

WHEN A MAN has been places and done things, an alias fits him about as well as his first pair of diapers. The most unlikely places are swarming with people who remember him.

In a Congo village, in a Tashkent slum, in a raw little settlement on Churchill, the fourth planet of Alpha Centauri, somebody is sure to come crawling out of the woodwork to ask, "When did you get back from Project Atmosphere on Mars?" or "How about that poker game on the old *Albert Einstein* in twenty-two ninety-five?" It had happened to Corson a dozen times, and always in the most unlikely and inconvenient places.

Now the unlikely place was the lobby of the Space-Carlton Hotel in Kweiyang, China. Corson braced himself as he followed the bellboy in from the helicopter, keenly aware that if he were not letter-perfect in his role as a tourist from Terra's colony on Mars, or if some old acquaintance penetrated his trivial disguises his death

When one of America's leading financial writers—Burton Crane has been a prominent staff writer for the NEW YORK TIMES *for a good many years—turns to the world of tomorrow in conflict with itself and analyzes its volcanic upheavals and revolts, its inventions and secret conspiracies, you can be sure that the entertainment meter will glow white hot. We're referring, of course, to the registering bulb at its summit which has been known to explode. But the electric bulb of this story is even more remarkable. It simply keeps on glowing, so dazzlingly you may well have to wear a radiation-insulated shield.*

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would be neither quick nor pleasant.

A week ago his hair had been dark and rather long. Now it was bleached and cut so short that it was little more than a peachdown fuzz against his spaceways tan. Small plastic inserts in his cheeks had changed the contour of his face. Padding stretched along his shoulders gave them a sharper slope.

"I rayed you from Lunar for one of your stinking rooms," said Corson abruptly. "Name of Mandeville." His offensive manner was deliberate. Martian colonists were notoriously boors, and had he been less abrupt he would have gotten off to a very bad start.

The desk clerk smiled and nodded. "Your papers, please."

The carefully-forged documents went into a shining metal device. There was a click. In seconds Kweichow Province gendarmerie headquarters would have facsimiles; in minutes they would be checked by world headquarters in Kokhara. The secret police were efficient in little things.

"If you will wait in the lounge," said the clerk, "I shall call you when the clearance comes through."

The lounge held the usual spaceways throng, mostly well-paid roughnecks, the truck and taxi drivers of the airless ways between the stars. Their women were like them, boldly handsome, brassy, tasteless. Every spaceport in the universe held their facsimiles, and every spaceport was pretty much the same—a money-mad boom town on the edge of a wasteland that could not be further injured by the variegated flares of atomic exhausts.

Against that over-dressed and over-noisy background, the girl seemed out of place. A little above medium height she was—perhaps six feet four. She had a figure that sang in its close-fitting metallic sheath and she moved like a melody.

Corson watched her as she took a seat opposite him. She was dark—perhaps with a dash of Tonkinese blood—and her perfect features, although warm and vital, were enigmatically non-committal. They betrayed nothing, volunteered no information.

The girl picked up a magazine, and leafed through its pages idly. It was an old technique. Corson had used it himself. The girl was not reading; she was *watching*.

Corson turned to follow her line of sight. And that was how he happened to see Moore enter the lobby from the door marked "Barber."

Moore had been reported dead. Not for a month had The Committee had word of him, and Corson himself had been sent to Kweiyang to keep his eyes and ears open. Here was a mystery, perhaps, but a welcome one. Moore was a good man. It was unthinkable that he could be alive after three months on so difficult and danger-

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ous an assignment without having learned a good deal.

Moore gave no sign by his manner or expression that he had seen Corson. His fingers fumbled in his pockets, extracted a short Venusian cigar, and lighted it without raising his eyes. But each movement could be performed in ten ways and each way was a number.

Corson read the signals easily. They said: *Seven—four—one.* Good! The code-conveyed numerals would be the number of Moore's room.

The bellboy had returned. "Your room, sir," he said.

As Corson went to the desk, he was conscious that Moore was cautiously following him at a distance.

"Room two twenty-two," said the desk clerk, "and now, sir, a few questions." There were more than a few. In addition to Name, Language, Planet, Address, Arrived From, Going Where and Probable Length of Stay, they covered such items as Address on January 1, 2311, Names of last Three Employers, Name and Nationality of Paternal Grandfather and Education. The last question had three divisions, Terrestrial, Martian or Extra-Terrestrial.

There were good reasons for the interrogation, Corson knew. Since man had never been able to attain a speed greater than that of light, his colonizing trips to the planets about Alpha Centauri still required more than four years. The leaders from the start had fought against the inevitable boredom by making a university of each shipload of a thousand souls, all screened for intelligence.

Great educators had been enlisted, definitive libraries and research laboratories loaded. And since there was nothing much else to do for twelve hours each day—eight were set aside for sleep and four more for sex and other forms of entertainment—nobody arrived at his new home without at least the basic equipment of a Terra-side Ph. D. or Doctor of Science. . . .

The trips back were pure enjoyment. On these the returning professors and a few laymen devoted themselves to basic research. It was on such a voyage back from Roosevelt, the third Alpha Centauri planet, that Krongold had developed the polymerization process that gave Mars and the moon adequate atmospheres in a single century of experimentation.

Although he had made two round trips to Alpha, Corson quickly and cheerfully indicated that his education had been Martian.

Men from the Alpha planets and not a few of those from Terra had enough subtlety to be dangerous. But the Martian colonists were generally neglected by the secret police. Their loud noises and occasional outbreaks of mob violence had no real significance and could be handled readily enough by the ordinary law enforcement agencies.

Room 222 was not locked. The bellboy threw open the door and

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stood aside for Corson to enter first.

"This room hasn't been cleaned yet," said Corson, his lips white. "You'd better give me another."

The bellboy looked past him and grunted a curse. In the middle of the floor lay the dead body of Moore.

II

THIS IS THE first of a series of addresses on human history to which you will be subjected on your voyage to the Planet Eisenhower. I hope my narrative-lecture method does not seem too strange to you. If it does, you will have four years in which to get used to it.

Because of the abominable inadequacies of your education to date, I shall have to fill in a good deal of background, so that you can understand the implications of Frederick Corson's history-making adventure.

The Atomic Wars of the second half of the Twentieth Century all but wiped out the advanced peoples of North America, Europe and Eastern Asia. Not a city of importance was left. Peace brought a hollow victory, for the underdeveloped peoples of Asia, Africa and South America submerged what was left of Western civilization by simple weight of numbers.

Inner Asia, Africa and South America had money and goods, and their factories were still operating. The West had nothing left, and faced utter starvation. Within a few months the new conquerors had bought or stolen every secret of atomic power. Under the leadership of a small and corrupt clique of Chinese—shortly to be replaced by an equally corrupt clique of Indians and Southeastern Russians—they ran the world.

The whole world was a police state. There were uniformed soldiers in every village, secret operatives of the police in every office, every factory. The United States became a country of fear, where no man trusted his nextdoor neighbor.

But Richard Hobart trusted Corliss Grayson and David Fellows trusted them both. Hobart was a chemist who knew that certain experiments with aniline dyes could make a person temporarily sterile. Grayson was a physicist whose specialty was radiation. Together they tackled the job—this was in the year 1995—of doing with rays what could with more difficulty be done by chemical reaction. To put the matter bluntly, they wanted to invent an electrical illuminating device that would temporarily sterilize anyone exposed to its rays for a reasonable length of time.

In time they got it and—in this they were lucky—succeeded in improving manufacturing processes so that their bulbs were brighter, longer-lived and cheaper to make than any others. Their specifications included a strange alloy called fellocrene, after the man who had

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backed them in their experiments.

Soon fellocrene light bulbs began to flood the markets of Asia, Africa and South America, competing in price even with the Chinese and Japanese bulbs. Before long demands—backed, it must be admitted, by ugly threats—began to arrive that Hobart, Grayson and Fellows license Argentine and Indian manufacturers to make the fellocrene bulbs.

The trio consented with apparent reluctance, stipulating only that they be allowed to exercise a monopoly in the American and European markets and retain control of the original source of supply.

This last provision was an important one, for the trio did not wish to cut birthrates too abruptly. To do so would have led to investigations, and the exposure and eventual defeat of their plan. That plan had nothing racial in it. Its sole aim was to deprive the totalitarian rulers in Bokhara of the mass of ill-educated robot-like manpower that was enabling them to suppress liberty throughout the world.

As Hobart and Grayson had anticipated, the birthrates of the backward areas fell away. Soon only Asiatics and Africans too poor to afford electricity were having children at a normal rate. By 2050—in fact, before the death of any one of the trio—they were privileged to see China's 400,000,000 population total drop to 180,000,000, and India's slip to 275,000,000. In another thirty years even those figures had been halved. The nations that had all but committed suicide in 1970 began to reassume positions of importance in world councils.

As might have been expected, manipulation of the fellocrene secret caused trouble. Only three men at a time were ever in control of the supply—first the sons and then the grandsons of the founders. But Chauncey Hobart, a grandson, seems to have been too unstable a character to have been trusted with such a world-stabilizing responsibility.

In 2103, in revenge for a bad evening at the hands of the secret police, he "conceded" to the East Russians the right to manufacture fellocrene bulbs within their own borders. As the East Russians ignored their agreement not to export, Greece, Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Egypt were virtually depopulated by 2200.

Another charge against Chauncey Hobart comes from the diary of Corliss Grayson IV. Australia lost its population, he wrote, because a girl named Daisy Miller jilted Hobart for a Brisbane lawyer named Hudson. Hobart maliciously sent them a hundred fellocrene bulbs as a wedding present and Hudson's uncle, a metallurgical engineer named Currie, pirated the fellocrene invention and marketed the bulbs throughout the Sixth Continent and New Zealand.

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By 2250, the continents were peopled as follows:

North America	*75,000,000*
South America	*10,000,000*
Asia and Oceania	*110,000,000*
Africa	*5,000,000*
Europe	*50,000,000*
Australia	*100,000**

At the same time, there were perhaps 25,000,000 descendants of North Americans and Europeans on other planets of the galaxy, principally the planet-necklace that whirls about Alpha Centauri.

It was in 2251 that The Committee was formed. Corliss Grayson IV, Henry Fellows and a man named Oscar Tarrant who had taken the Hobart place in the trio, decided that world depopulation should end. The odds had now become even enough, they believed, to enable men of good will to win back their liberties without resort to subterfuge or violence. Production of fellocrene was abruptly stopped.

By 2312—when this portion of our story opens—the over-all population figures had virtually doubled.

There had, of course, been other changes in the world. Hrdlicka's Twentieth Century finding that man grew taller when fed regularly and well was impressively confirmed, for the smaller populations had wiped out famines. In North America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the men in most families gained an average of four inches in the first hundred years.

This proved to be a somewhat wavering rate of growth, declining about thirty-five percent in each succeeding century. But by 2312 the six-foot-eight man was as common as his six-foot-one ancestor of four centuries earlier.

Even in that day the average life-span was almost two hundred years. The epochal discoveries of Garson Merriwell, which doubled that figure, were not to come until 2340.

With plenty to eat, disease almost unknown and the assurance of a long life in which to enjoy himself, man had every reason in the world to be happy—or so the Bokhara World Government constantly declared. But mankind in general had grown tired of living in a miasma of suspicion and terror, and it was perhaps inevitable that The Committee should have been formed.

III

EVEN TODAY there must be gaps in my story of Corson's adventure, due to the secrecy that surrounded The Committee and its organization. Not until the definitive history by Grayson Fellows appears in 2400 will the missing details be available.

We do know, however, that the organization to which Corson belonged had been set up to make the loss of any one unit as unim-

*Mostly bushmen, with a few bushmen-kangaroo hybrids.

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portant as possible. Workers in the field never knew their superiors. If one were captured and tortured he could never tell more than the location of the radiophone through which he talked to the men above him. Since nobody ever answered until the speaker's vibration-pattern had been matched with that of the office he happened to be calling at the time, each captured agent was a dead end.

There is even the story of the excitable agent who was so emotionally upset when he rushed to his radiophone that he had to talk for three hours before the vibrations of his voice dropped to a recognizable pattern.

The history of Corson's induction into the organization of The Committee is typical of a good many others.

He was twenty-six at the time, recently returned from a round trip to Churchill and Roosevelt and an assistant professor of politics and history at the University of Kansas. When agents of the World Government at Kokhara objected to a lecture on the old democratic systems of government, Corson had been caught in the middle of the controversy. Student riots followed. Three Kokhara agents had been killed and three hundred student and faculty rioters flattened with gas bombs. That, of course, ended Corson's career as a teacher. In the normal course of events he would have disappeared, and his grave would have gone unmarked.

As it was, he disappeared but not to a grave. He awoke to consciousness on a cot in a small windowless room. His head had been shaved and he was dressed as a common laborer.

He got up and tried the door. It was locked on the outside.

"You are Frederick Corson?" asked a voice. It seemed to come from a large tapestry picture above the cot.

"I am," said Corson. "Who are you?"

A light went on behind the tapestry and the head of a man was revealed. It was, however, a head disguised with false eyebrows, mustache and large cloth nose.

"I hope my beauty doesn't blind you," said the speaker. "Frankly, my boy, my friends and I are looking upon you as a possible recruit. You don't really like this World Government, do you?"

Corson shrugged. "If you represent it, I'm dead already, so I may as well tell you the truth. I am bitterly opposed to any system of government that survives by suppressing individual liberty."

"Do you have any friends who agree with you?"

"Dozens, I'm sure," Corson said. "But I've talked to only three or four."

"Would you like to talk to more —under such conditions as these?"

"Yes, but what would be the point?"

"Perhaps you could persuade

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them to join you in doing the work of The Committee."

"What's that?"

"That's the only name our organization has. At the moment it is solely a recruiting organization. When the time seems ripe, it will become a revolutionary army. We need a good many men such as you."

Corson's answer came quickly. "I don't see what I have to lose," he said. "We have no liberty at all now. I'm with you."

"That's what I expected," said the man with the eyebrows. "Now I am going to take your picture for a new identity card. Before I come back you will fingerprint yourself a number of times on the blank forms you'll find on that table by the door. But I also have another job for you. This establishment, a vacant restaurant, bought and cleaned out a few days ago. Before the new occupant moves in, a non-directional radiophone must be installed in a secret compartment behind the men's washroom. The equipment is in the room next door. You'll find instructions and blueprints with it."

The tapestry picture was pushed aside. A flashbulb bloomed. Then Corson discovered that he was alone.

It had been exacting, dangerous, lonely work, but it had carried with it a sense of accomplishment. For a long time he had been a recruiter, moving cautiously from place to place, out of touch with The Committee save for a single address filed in his memory—the address of the restaurant containing the secret radiophone.

Certain skills were lacking on Terra and Corson was ordered back to the Alpha planets to recruit the men The Committee needed. When he returned to Terra at the age of thirty-six, he was immediately sent for.

Since the destruction and contamination of the whole northeastern area of the United States more than three centuries earlier, the region had been allowed to grow back to forest. Hardly anybody lived there. Four hours out of Knoxville, the Eastern capital, he found himself flying over a wild and beautiful stretch of country that he judged to be in the Adirondacks. Then the helicopter-plane lost its forward momentum and settled down in a tiny landing field beside a rugged promontory.

The home of his host, he discovered, was solidly built into the cliff wall, and skilfully concealed.

Corson was met at the cave-entrance by a large heavyset man wearing the toystore eyebrows and mustache of The Committee's interviewers.

"To night," he said, "you will meet two other members of The Committee. Since I am the largest in stature, perhaps you had better call me Mr. Big—I assure you it has no other connotation—and the other two gentlemen Mr. Medium and Mr. Small.

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Then it had come out. The Committee was gravely worried.

"We are almost ready to strike," said Mr. Medium, who seemed to be the real leader of the trio. "The World Government has grown careless. Bureaucracy has developed to such mushrooming dimensions that nobody dares to make an important decision on his own responsibility. Most of the inspectors of important military stores are now our men. I need hardly tell you that all uranium, hydrogen, lithium and omicron bombs have had to be 're-designed' and that the original lethal charges are now resting at the bottom of the Japan Deep."

"Wonderful!" said Corson.

"Yes, so far, so good," said Mr. Medium. "But now we're up against a new development. Let's have the figures, Mr. Big."

Mr. Big adjusted a jeweler's eyepiece and consulted notes written so fine they looked like dust. "One of our men in the statistical office," he said, "reported six months ago that no children at all were born in Winter Park, Florida, in the year twenty-three eleven."

"You know about fellocrene?" asked Mr. Small.

"I know what it did," said Corson.

"That's enough for anyone to know," said Mr. Small. He continued: "We checked on those figures and found that they were right. We also found Oklahoma City with a gross birthrate of one point thirty-one per thousand. Alberta's rate was down to one point twenty-one and Alaska had only zero point seven. Do you see what that means?"

"Fellocrene or something like it seems to be in use again."

"Yes, and it is no new thing. Now that we have access to them, we have gone back over past figures for North America and Western Europe. As you probably know, the manufacture of fellocrene was halted sixty-one years ago. But for almost fifteen years somebody has been gradually increasing the supply to this continent."

"Not to Europe?"

"Not so far as we can tell," Mr. Small said.

"Who is doing it?" Corson asked.

"That is precisely what we do not know and that is why we are worried. Fellocrene can be pirated. We know that. But we also know that a bulb made of it loses its power to produce sterility in a single year. That means a big organization. It is our belief that the bulbs are being brought in from Mars or the Alpha planets."

"You've checked this suspicion?"

"Carefully. They don't come in at White Sands or the Berlin Waste or the Stalingrad Desert or at Marrakesh. We're not sure yet about Marrakesh. We're checking again. But a month ago we got a brief word from an agent named Moore at Kweiyang—"

"I think I know Moore," said

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Corson. "I recruited a Waldemar Moore."

"That's the one," said Mr. Medium. "All Moore said was, 'I think I have something and I'm checking.' Since that message, we haven't heard from him. We believe he must be dead."

"The thing that bothers us," said Mr. Small, "is that we haven't the slightest idea where the menace comes from. This new force may be as big as we are—and have diametrically opposite objectives."

"A *coup d'etat* by a force that had brains as well as bureaucratic authority," said Mr. Medium, "could set us back a hundred years."

Corson studied the scrap of paper on which somebody had written the address of the Kweiyang restaurant where he could expect to find a hidden telephone connection with The Committee's agents.

"I think I know what my job is to be," he said. "But I should like to make one request in advance."

"I am sure it will be a reasonable one," said Mr. Medium.

"Moore was a friend of mine," said Corson. "We had four years together on the old *Albert Einstein* when we went out to Churchill in twenty-two ninety-one. Five years ago I went back, found him on Eisenhower and recruited him. He never knew it was I, of course. But we spent a good deal of time together. He was a grand guy."

"Go ahead," said Mr. Medium.

"It's a simple little request but I know it's unusual," said Corson. "I only want The Committee's permission to kill the man who murdered Moore."

Mr. Medium looked inquiringly at his colleagues. Mr. Big and Mr. Small nodded their heads silently.

"Request granted," said Mr. Medium. "Good hunting, Fred."

IV

MOORE hadn't been dead when Corson made that request. But now Moore was dead, half of his upper chest torn away with an explosive bullet.

The bellboy dropped the bags. He darted for the phone, reached out his hand for it and halted abruptly.

"I forgot!" he said. "Mustn't touch. I keep forgetting." He was at the door again. "You wait here. Don't let anybody in." He was gone like a streak of purposeful lightning down the hall.

Corson worked fast, hoping against hope that the killer hadn't given the body a real search . . .

Avoiding the blood from the wound in Moore's throat, he reached into the man's mouth, and unscrewed the upper left molar. If Moore had learned anything, his notes should have been concealed there. They were, on a tiny, tightly wadded bit of paper, written almost too small to be read with the naked eye.

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Where could he hide the vitally important message? In his own hollow tooth? It no longer existed. Information had come back a month or so previously that the secret police knew that hollow teeth were often utilized in just such a manner by agents of The Committee. Perhaps an old-fashioned, more obvious place . . .

He unstrapped one of his own bags. They had been searched once, he knew, and quite possibly would not be examined again. He unscrewed the bottle of shaving lotion, pried the thin cork plug from inside the top, shoved in the sliver of paper and replaced both the cork and top. Then he restrapped the bag.

Seconds later he was climbing the service stairway to the seventh floor. If Moore had discovered anything more, some indication of the line to follow would very likely be found in his room.

The door of Room 741 was not locked. Corson entered warily. On the bureau was a large, almost nude photograph of the girl he had seen in the lobby.

She was facing the camera, dipping a tentative foot into a deep green mountain pool. Sunlight filtered in a golden crescent through bamboo branches, and flecked with shadow the smooth tan of her shining limbs. In her eyes and the curl of her lips was a slight challenge.

Never had Corson seen anyone quite so beautiful. Not even in the Selecto caves of Churchill, where the pleasure dome proprietors use all the resources of science to enhance the loveliness of women for purposes of entertainment had he seen a figure of such flawless perfection.

He realized at once that he had to have that picture! Using his handkerchief to guard against fingerprints, he opened the heavy silver frame and removed the stiff pasteboard at its back. Lying against the reverse of the photograph was a bit of hotel stationery. On it Moore had written: "C-173."

It was then that somebody knocked on the door. We do not know his name, his nationality or even his purpose today. We do know, however, that if he had not knocked at that exact moment in the stream of time the history of the world would have been tragically different. Corson would have taken the picture, like a moonstruck young fool, and hidden it on his person. Then, when he returned to his room, he'd have been searched to the skin and the secret police would have had disturbing things to think about.

But that tragedy was almost miraculously averted. At the first knock, Corson slipped the paper into his mouth and chewed. By the second, he was in the bathroom, edging out the open window to the fire escape. Not much later, running along a third-floor corridor, he saw a tall figure ahead of him moving toward the stairs.

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"Hey!" called Corson. "There's been a murder in my room. I need help."

Startled, the man swung about to stare. "Where's your room?"

"Second floor—right below here."

"Come along then."

When they entered Room 222 four men were standing grouped in a semi-circle about Moore's body. One was the bellboy.

"What's this, Wang?" said the most official looking of the four. "Who's your friend?"

The bellboy said: "That's Mr. Mandeville. He was assigned to this room."

"That's right," confirmed Corson.

"You were told to stay here. Where the hell did you go?"

"I don't take orders from bellboys," Corson said. "I went for help."

"What took you so long?"

"The first two guys I talked to didn't seem interested."

"What'd they say?"

"One said, 'Oh, yeah?' and the other, 'So what?' "

The detective's manner changed. "You know this guy?" he asked.

"I never saw him before in my life," Corson replied.

"Then why did he pick your room to die in?"

"Did he?" Corson's voice was tinged with irony.

"What do you mean by that? He died, all right."

"Sure, but he couldn't have known it was my room. I didn't know myself until Young Hopeful here opened the door."

The detective turned to the bellboy. "Is that right?" he demanded.

The bellboy nodded.

"Speak up! I can't hear you."

"That's the way it was."

"Okay," said the detective. "I guess that about clears everything up. Just take off your clothes and toss 'em over here—one by one."

The search was thorough, but the searchers found nothing.

The detective was more friendly. "Tell the desk to give you another room," he said.

"How about my bags?"

"We'll send 'em around as soon as we've gone through 'em. Just a formality."

Corson tried to look amused. "If you guys aren't careful, you'll wear 'em out."

"Our fingers," said the chief detective, "will brush as lightly as thistledown."

The bellboy took him to his new room.

A trained operative such as Corson always finds it hard to believe that enemy operatives aren't fully as bright as he. Books of reminiscences from the twentieth century wars—the last wars—reveal that each nation thought of the agents of the enemy as fiendishly clever and privately considered its own agents dolts and bunglers.

So it was with Corson. If he had been searching his bags, he would have looked beneath the cork in

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his shaving lotion bottle. He also would have opened the toothpaste tube from the bottom, unscrewed the mechanism of the electric razor and sprayed a breath of iodine vapor on an occasional letter or book-page, looking for secret writing. It did not occur to him that secret policemen going through the same suspicious routine every day, every week, every year, could grow bored and less meticulous.

From his point of view, there was less than an even chance that Moore's concealed report would go undiscovered. Discovery meant his death and the failure of his mission. It seemed prudent to guard against the first, patriotic to beware of the second.

Corson slipped out of the hotel by a side door as the day grew late. After a brisk walk, during which he checked repeatedly to make sure that he was not followed, he turned down Thieves' Street and entered an unobtrusive restaurant. The small eating establishment was the only address he knew in Kweiyang.

At the moment when he dropped into an unoccupied booth and ordered a meal, the secret police in his hotel room—who had decided from his manner that he was only a dumb Martian colonist and a pretty good Joe—had finished with their cursory search and were helping themselves to the excellent Martian *gussy*-whiskey they had found in his bag. In a little while they would fill the bottle back to its former level with tapwater and go about their business.

When the crowd in the restaurant thinned out a little, Corson entered the men's washroom, closed the door of the lefthand booth behind him and pressed three studs on the rear wall. Instantly the wall swung inward, revealing a tiny sound-proof telephone booth. He lifted the receiver. Somewhere a tiny generator began to hum softly.

V

FRED CORSON dialed the frequency garbling attachment to its proper setting for month, day and hour and commenced to speak softly into the radiotelephone.

Voice-rhythm must match with body-rhythm. He began to recite the "epic" of The Bowlegged Barmaid of Boca Ratan, to which he had added more than a hundred stanzas of his own in the past dozen years. The lonesome men who waited at radio stations for The Committee knew everyone of them. A new one was an event:

The bowlegged barmaid of Boca Ratan
Could seldom keep romance alight.
She had six Norwegians
Who swore their allegiance
But wore them all out in a night.
Her standards were high.
She demanded a guy
That she'd rather love no one else than.

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But she came face to face
With the fact that our race
Of such utter perfection contained
not a trace,
So with King-right-through-Two-
Spot in place of the Ace
She managed at Boca Ratan.

"Okay, One-Two-One," said a voice. "You check. What do you know about Eight-Three-Four?"

Corson told the story.

"How did he know you were an agent?"

"I don't think he did, for sure, but I was a friend and didn't speak to him, so he knew I might be. He gave the finger signals, but he knew that I couldn't know them and that no harm would be done if I weren't an agent."

He continued: "First, flash that symbol C-one seventy-five back to headquarters. See if anybody can figure out a possible meaning. Second, I want a run-down for any possible information about this girl I've told you about. She's so beautiful that she must be in the entertainment field. Either she is or her daddy is so rich she doesn't have to work."

"Why do you say that?"

"Her clothes must have cost a mint. See if any dame fitting this picture is missing from her usual haunts anywhere." He gave a detailed description.

"That's going to take some time," said the man at the other end. "The boys will have to run through all the recent papers."

"I have an idea it may be worth it. Now listen carefully. I have one of my hunches. Something big may blow up here at any moment and I'm likely to want help. If we have any other agents in the area, give them a rendezvous in case I need them. They ought to be armed."

"You can count on at least a dozen," said the radio voice.

"That ought to be enough," said Corson. "Shall we sign off?"

The voice at the other end became cajoling: "You got any more stanzas of The Barmaid?"

"I'll have another for you tomorrow about noon," Corson promised. He hung up and returned to his restaurant table.

At the far side of the booth sat The Girl, a pistol aimed at his mid-section.

"Sit down," she said.

It took the waiter, it seemed to Corson, an inexcusably long time to unload his stack of dishes and depart. Meanwhile, The Girl kept her pistol trained on Corson below the level of the table top.

"Perhaps you'd care to join me," he said.

"I don't feel hungry."

She had spoken only six words but those few syllables, Corson felt, might hold the answer to the entire riddle.

Since the depopulation of Greece in the twenty-second century, the letter "d" or "delta" had been pronounced "dh"—like the "th" in "there"—in only one locality in the known universe. That was Ne'

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Elladha—New Greece—the largest continent on the Planet Eisenhower. It had been peopled by the finest young men and women of old Greece.

For the past forty years the President and virtual father of Ne' Elladha had been Demetrios Christophorou, affectionately called Mitsos by everyone. On his last trip to Eisenhower, Corson had tried to get help from Mitsos for the liberation of Terra. In spite of the exalted position of the man, the anonymous interview had been amazingly easy to arrange. Mitsos knew that everybody loved him. His guards, as usual, were occupied elsewhere by their own pursuits.

Mitsos had been intensely interested but cagey. Corson had gained the impression that revolt on Terra was an idea on which the Ne' Elladhan President had thought long and productively. Quite obviously it could never be a project on which he would move as the lieutenant of someone else. He would have to be the leader in his own right.

It was only an impression, but as he heard The Girl say "dhown" and "dhon't," Corson felt sure that Mitsos had already started work. He decided to attack at once.

"Did Mitsos come on this last trip?" he asked. "He said he might."

There was no change in The Girl's expression. "I dhon't know what you are talking about," she said.

Corson shrugged. "Have it your own way," he said. "But Mitsos must have been psychotic to send you here as an agent. You're unbelievably beautiful. Wherever you go people keep looking at you, even when they don't suspect you. You could never get away with anything."

"So you really think I'm beautiful?"

"Most men, seeing you for the first time, would have difficulty in pretending otherwise."

She smiled. "Do the Terran men always flatter so outrageously?"

"Heavens, no. We're a tongue-tied lot compared with you people around Alpha. But you have an unusual effect on me. Yes," he continued chattily, "you must have started for Terra before I talked to Mitsos last. He had a couple of other cute babes he wanted to send, but I talked him out of it. How long you been here? I'd really like to know."

She seemed to weigh her words before replying. "May I ask, Mr. Mandeville, just what part you think you are playing in the organization?"

It looked like a slip. At least it seemed to admit the existence of an organization.

"Look, kid," he said. "Before I go on, how about giving me a name? It needn't be your own name, just something I can call you."

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"If you must call me anything, call me Maria."

"Very good, Maria. Now I'll tell you. I have no real part in the organization. Mitsos wants his own people in the main jobs, or so I've been given to understand. I'm a kind of adviser. Although I've been out to Eisenhower twice, I've spent most of my life on Terra. I know the ropes here."

"And would that help?"

"Well, maybe it wouldn't. But I've persuaded Mitsos it would help a great deal. You wouldn't begrudge a poor spaceman his job, would you?"

"You are a pilot?"

"Why, sure!" He stopped with a show of shamefaced confusion. "Oh, what's the sense of kidding you? You could check up on me too easily. I was a kind of steward. I ran the hydroponics banks."

"And what could 'a-kind-of-steward' do to help Mitsos?"

"You want an example? Well—suppose you were determined to drop a sleep-bomb on secret police headquarters. I could tell you the exact hour when you'd catch most of the snoopers there."

"Yes, that could be useful." Maria agreed. "You've pretty well convinced me that you are what you say you are. May I ask for one more proof?"

"Of course. Anything."

Still holding the pistol, she groped for a hidden pocket and came up with a tightly-folded sheet of tissue paper. It looked, Corson realized, exactly like the message from Moore's hollow tooth which he had hidden beneath the cork in the shaving lotion bottle. Maria tossed it across the table.

"What's this?" he asked.

"A message of some kind," she said promptly. "I thought Mitsos might have given you the key for it. I can't read it by anything he gave us."

Corson unfolded the paper. His heart jumped. Yes, it was definitely the message from Moore's hollow tooth!

"Where'd you pick this up?" he demanded.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that," she said. "Does it make any sense?"

"You'll have to give me a little time." He spread the message out on the table and concentrated. It began:

hechd eulho qeasm alnny hysph
qragn ckehm elasr zhhxt souhq
whfhb axohl hmmht nitri daljy
imchd arrfa lhthg dioxm cnanl
swdhw jhtup leetr eathe tuhhj
lwatn qhtox cbokm cswha
mm . . .

Shaking his head as if in bewilderment, Corson made fairly rapid progress in decoding the message. It was actually a variation of an old newspaper cipher invented during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, and could be read at sight by a man in the know.* The

*Readers who want to try will find the key on a later page.

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Committee's agents quite naturally used it seldom. But it was handy to have in an emergency, when no safer method of communication had been arranged with another agent in advance. Most agents knew it by rote.

"Are you getting anywhere at all?" Maria asked.

With the first part of the message burning into his brain, Corson shook his head. "Not so far," he said. "But I've got something back in my bag at the hotel that may enable us to read it."

The girl twitched the paper from his hand. "Then suppose we go back there."

"Okay. But remember, I'm not promising anything." He rose and waved a bill at the waiter. "I'll be with you in a minute."

Corson turned toward the washroom. His urgent job now was to report on what he had learned. Let The Committee get to work while he labored to patch up the wreck of the theories he had built about this case. He was reaching for the door when the girl spoke.

"I think that had better wait," she said. The hand that aimed the pistol at him was steady.

"Have it your own way," said Corson. He left the restaurant, the girl following.

"Walk ahead of me," she said.

Corson started for the hotel. It would be safe to return there now. Obviously, the secret police had not found anything in the suitcase to incriminate him. Unless—he caught himself up short—unless the girl herself belonged to the secret police.

The girl was walking about twenty yards behind him now, holding her pistol ready in her handbag. Should he make a break for it? When he came to the next corner, he might turn quickly and sprint, opening up a lead of fifty yards. In spite of the misconceptions of fictioneers, a running, weaving man is almost impossible to hit with a hand-weapon at that distance.

He put off the decision. There would be other corners later. Meanwhile, his wisest course would be to get his thoughts in order. Precisely what did he know?

First, he had the contents of Moore's message—at least the first part. Western Europeans under somebody named Hans von Schwann were planning to take over the principal military installations on March 3. He realized that this made much more sense than the supposition that good old Mitsos was planning an attack. The benevolent President of Ne' Elladha would never have agreed to the use of fellocrene bulbs.

Second, he told himself, he knew that there were four elements in the situation: The Bokhara Government with its secret police; The Committee, The Hans von Schwann organization, and Mitsos, Maria and Ne' Elladha.

The European organization might have men in sufficient num-

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bers to enable it to seize a few of the bases, load atomic weapons aboard planes and attempt to terrorize the Bokhara Government into submission. Von Schwann did not know that the bombs were useless.

But perhaps the bluff would work. In that event, The Committee's men should be ready to step in and take over. Were there enough of them? Could they be mobilized in time? Corson did not know. But perhaps Mitsos had enough of an organization. Perhaps he had enough really useful bombs to swing the balance of power. Perhaps an alliance between Mitsos and The Committee would be possible.

But did Mitsos have more than a handful of agents on Terra? Were his spaceships—assuming any or all of them were armed—on the Moon, Mars, or Venus, close enough to be summoned in time? After all, March 3 was only three weeks away!

These were questions for The Committee to answer. At any cost, he knew that he must get away, make his report and ask permission to approach Maria with a proposal for an alliance. At the next corner he would make his break.

But then the girl spoke. "We stop here," she said.

She knocked and an old-fashioned Chinese gate swung open. They crossed a paved courtyard, entered a one-story house, passed through a long and almost dark corridor and came out into a large, well-lighted room. A dozen men sat around a table covered with maps.

VI

"HERE YOU ARE, Hans," said the girl. "I think I've got the answer to your questions about that other organization."

"Who's this man?" asked the apparent leader of the group.

"He's a kind of agent for Demetrios Christophorou. The old boy seems to have some kind of idea of freeing the world from Bokhara."

"From four light years away? He's crazy!"

The apparent leader rose to take a closer look at Corson. He was fully as tall as Maria's companion, with powerful shoulders and a lean, dark face.

"What do you know about this boy?" he demanded.

"Enough, I think." There was naked satisfaction in Maria's voice. "He's a space rat, a hydroponic farmer. Christophorou uses him to show other agents the ropes, but he doesn't trust him too much. I fooled him into thinking I was one of his people by talking in a Ne' Elladhan accent."

"Good work, Maria! So what do we do with him now?"

"I'll leave that up to you. You may be able to persuade him to tell you how to get in touch with

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some of the high-powered men in his organization."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Hans. He chuckled. "Shove him down here into the light and let's get a good look at him."

Until he stepped forward into the circle about the table, Corson had been congratulating himself. By a near miracle he had landed in what seemed to be world headquarters of the von Schwann organization. By offering full cooperation, by making up plausible lies, he might soon find himself adopted as an assistant or accessory.

Then he heard the laugh. It came from a heavyset man with a stiff brush of red hair. The situation was suddenly reversed, for this man not only knew him by sight. He knew him well.

"Is this your hydroponics farmer, Maria?" he asked, and laughed again.

"What's the matter, Terence?" asked von Schwann.

"I'm afraid an expert has been pulling the leg of the beautiful Maria. I've known this fellow under two different names and in neither case was he an ignorant space rat. This, my dear Hans, is Frederick Corson, whose brilliant book on comparative civilizations caused such a stir a dozen years ago. He is also, I am certain, Rodney Brill, who was lecturing on the cosmic ray on the Planet Eisenhower only six short years ago. If I might make a guess, I should say that Corson-Brill is a top agent for that other dangerous organization opposing the Bokhara Government—The Committee."

Terrence turned abruptly to Maria. "What does he call himself here and what is he supposed to be?"

Corson had been watching the girl intently. Judging by her expression, she was chagrined. No other emotion had come through. Now, however, she spoke with some strain.

"He says his name is Mandeville," she said. "And he has two personalities. For the secret police, he was a rough Martian colonist—a space jockey. For me, he was a Terran, but equally ignorant."

Von Schwann nodded. "If he isn't an agent, he has no need for a cover story." He turned to Corson. "What's it going to be, my boy? Are you going to tell us, or will we be compelled to kick it out of you?"

"I'll talk," said Corson. "I'll tell you everything I know. But you've apparently run into other agents of The Committee. You know that I can tell you nothing about the people above me and precious little about those below. Even though I may walk away from this little trap alive, my usefulness to The Committee would be ended. But The Committee will go right on."

In his mind was a plan. He would talk freely of everything he had known until he met Messrs. Big, Medium and Small, but he would exaggerate their knowledge

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of the von Schwann organization. The Committee and von Schwann had the same objective—the overthrow of the Bokhara Government. Perhaps, if he played his part well . . .

"How much do you know about us?" asked von Schwann.

"Very little," said Corson. "I know that your name is Hans von Schwann. I know that you head an organization much like ours. You are now placing your men for a *coup d'etat* on March 3."

Von Schwann swore. "There's obviously a traitor among us! We set that date scarcely three days ago!"

"And I left Knoxville yesterday. I knew it before I started and I also knew that you plan to take over the main military installations, and seize the big bomb supplies."

He drew a deep breath. Now for a long leap from what he knew into probabilities! "The main effort will be here in Kweiyang. Here you will load several ships with omicron bombs, fly to Bokhara and try to cow the World Government into submission."

At the edge of the circle he saw a man catch another's eye and smile.

"At least," he added, "that is one plan. The stronger group among you wants to obliterate Bokhara as a beginning move and it is my understanding that you will attempt to do so."

Terence Costigan was on his feet. "If they know this much, Hans, they can stop us. They're bigger than we are!"

"Much bigger," said Corson. "The Committee has been building its organization for sixty years. You West Europeans are latecomers."

"How many men do you have?"

"Nobody ever told me."

"Where is your headquarters here?"

Corson grinned. "You've caught other agents of The Committee, haven't you? Then surely you must know that we don't work with groups. Agents in an area communicate by garbled radio with a secret station—so secret that even we don't know where it is or even how far away it is."

"But you can communicate with The Committee?"

"Easily. I'll make my proposition. You make yours. Then, if you'll let me go for an hour, I will bring back The Committee's answer."

"Do you feel you're in position to bargain?"

"Most definitely, and you know it. Look, von Schwann, you are planning an attack with a trifling force. You've got to have the advantage of surprise to succeed. If The Committee isn't ready to move, it can eliminate the element of surprise in any one of a dozen ways. You've got to deal with us."

"How?"

"Join us. Divide the work. Let The Committee take over part of it."

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"This has been my show from the start," said von Schwann.

"I know," said Corson. "And there's one more thing. You've got to agree to stop sending fellocrene bulbs into North America. That is not considered a friendly gesture."

"I told you, Hans," said Costigan. "That was a long-range plan and all your others were short-range. I'll bet that's the way they got on to us."

"That's right," said Corson cheerfully.

"Shut up, both of you!" said von Schwann. "Kurt and Pierre, lock this fellow up. I'm not letting anyone take this play away from me. We've got to talk things over."

"You're going to be sorry about this," said Corson.

"Shut up! Double-handcuff him to something solid, Pierre—and bring me the keys."

"Right," said Pierre.

Corson found himself being propelled toward a door. "I've got just one more thing to say," he called back over his shoulder. "You'd better make up your minds to work with The Committee, because there isn't a single operative atom, hydrogen or omicron bomb left on Terra today."

The room was suddenly very silent.

"Say that again," said von Schwann.

Corson did so.

"Lock him up," said the leader quietly. "That was the biggest of all his bluffs."

Pierre and Kurt handcuffed Corson—once to a water pipe, and once to a heavy, stainless steel bed.

"We shall handle you gently, my friend," said Pierre. "I have an idea that before long we shall be comrades at arms and friends. Hans is impulsive."

For a short time after they left Corson could hear an angry interchange of orders. Then hasty feet pounded through the corridor and motors purred into life. For perhaps two hours there was complete silence. Then the motors came back and feet raced through the corridor. In the big room indistinguishable voices engaged in a discussion. That was when he heard his name being called.

"Corson!"

He rolled over on the bed. The voice came from the window opening on the courtyard.

"Yes?"

"This is Maria. They have some agents in the bomb dumps. They were able to get in and examine some of the bombs. Now they are back and reporting to Hans. We can talk for a minute."

"Go ahead."

"I want to work for The Committee."

Corson chuckled. "Han's girl—a Committee agent?"

"I'm *not* his girl. But he wants me to be. I thought at first that it would be a great adventure with history."

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"It is. Don't question that for a moment."

"But now I see that he would only have the world exchange one kind of tyrant for another. When you left he raved that The Committee would destroy all of his plans for world conquest. He hates all Americans."

"So where does that leave us?"

"I did not show Hans the message which you took from Moore's hollow tooth. When you looked at it, I was sure you understood it. If it was that easy, I decided, Hans could read it too. He is very clever and he would have instantly realized that all of your information came from Moore and that The Committee really knew nothing about his plans."

"Again, where does that leave us?"

"I want you to tell me how to get a message through to The Committee. I will tell them exactly what happened to Moore. I will tell them where you are. I will read the Moore cipher. Then I will reveal everything I know about Hans."

"Let me think for a minute."

"Not too long. They will be coming soon."

What did he have to lose? His usefulness as an agent—on this assignment, at least—was ended. If the girl had been intent on tricking him, she would have given the message to Hans. It was only a simple substitution cipher which any reasonably intelligent cryptographer could break down in fifteen minutes.*

If she were deceiving him, only the one radiophone would be lost—for nobody would answer when she called.

"All right, my dear," he said. "I'll take a chance." He told her how to find the radiophone, and how to set the garbler.

"Say immediately that you are not an agent but that this is an emergency," he instructed her. "Tell them where I am and who holds me. Read the Moore message letter by letter. Then go on and tell them everything. You got that?"

Maria laughed. She had a beautiful, silvery laugh.

"You poor fool!" she whispered. "You deceived me before, but nobody does that twice!"

Feet came down the corridor and Maria vanished from the window. Pierre and Kurt unlocked the handcuffs.

But the girl was not present when they hustled Corson back into the big room.

"Damn it, you told the truth!" said von Schwann. He was no longer in complete control of him-

*Cryptography was virtually a dead science in the early twenty-fourth century and Corson may have over-estimated Hans and his friends. In the old cipher the vowels, including Y, were unchanged. The consonants stood for those most like them, as B for V and vice versa, C for S, D for T, F for Z, G for K, H for W, J for X, L for R, M for N, and P for Q. To confuse decipherers, the fourth letter in each five-letter group was a null, standing for nothing. Occasional five-letter groups were also nulls, first the fifth group, then the fourth group, and so on.

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self. He looked mussed and worried.

"Naturally," said Corson. Where had the girl gone? From the evidence at hand, she had told von Schwann nothing. "If The Committee is to work with you people," he continued, "there must be complete frankness on both sides."

"*Can* we work with you?"

"Why not? It looks easy to me. All we need is a battle plan, dividing the work and making sure that we do not fight each other."

"And the next step?"

"First I suggest that you tell me enough about your numbers and your dispositions to enable me to sound convincing when I report. Then set me at liberty."

"Will that be necessary?"

"Naturally. I can't reveal my methods of contact. I should have an answer for you in two hours at most. After that, perhaps you can go with me and talk to The Committee directly."

Von Schwann vacillated for a moment or so, then snatched a sheet of paper from the table. "These figures are the only ones I'm prepared to reveal now," he said.

The typed sheet indicated a world force of 60,000 men, 20,000 of them within a hundred-mile striking radius of Kweiyang. The main concentrations were in Kweilin, Liuchow and Paose.

"Very good," said Corson. "May I go now?"

He saluted. Von Schwann cracked his heels together and returned the salute.

Corson ran in the wrong direction for three or four blocks, making certain that he was not being followed. Then he zigzagged carefully back to the restaurant. He was working on the door of the darkened building when he heard the girl speak from the little alley across the narrow street.

"Put them up, Corson-Brill," she said. "Hans may have let you go but I've no intention of doing so."

Corson heard the familiar whoosh of a hand sleep-bomb discharger and dived desperately for the road. As he lost consciousness, he heard the girl empty her pistol. Then she must have gone under, too.

VII

MR. MEDIUM was sitting in the chair across the room when Corson came to. He listened quietly as Corson told his story.

"There was nothing strange about your rescue," he said. "You had requested that agents in the area be put under your command. They had been told to hang around that radiophone and to identify themselves to each other by hand signals. They also knew what you looked like and the names you had used. When she called your name and started shooting, one of the men used the sleep-bomb."

"What happens now?" asked Corson. "Do we join with Hans?"

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"I hardly think so," said Mr. Medium. "From Moore's message, which we found, and from what you tell me, Hans von Schwann sounds like an old-fashioned totalitarian, a tyrant hardly better than the World Government he wants to displace. Pardon me a moment."

He left the room. When he came back he was smiling beneath his comedy mustache.

"All the arrangements are working out quite simply," he said. He looked at his watch. "Do you have any questions?"

"Yes," Corson said. "Are we going to take advantage of this moment and strike now?"

"I hardly think so. Two or three of our men are now on the Praesidium of the World Government. They are working their way up. We can afford to wait for the right moment. Perhaps ten years more will do the trick."

"I want to know more about the girl. Did you ever identify her?"

"Yes. She is a famous Italian actress. We had no trouble at all."

"But how did she get Moore's message?"

"Very simply. She killed him and was hiding in the closet of your room when you entered with the bellboy. She saw you change the hiding place and retrieved the message when you left."

"But why didn't she give it to Hans?"

"Maria," said Mr. Medium, "has a very strange set of emotions. You had fooled her. Hans and Terence had jeered at her. To get even, she had to spoil your plans all by herself."

"But she could have done it merely by showing the message."

"That would have been too simple," said Mr. Medium. His smile was fatherly. "And now, my boy, I think you had better join me in a gas mask." He walked to the window. Corson followed.

Far in the sky above, three tiny dots appeared, falling rapidly.

"Sleep bombs?" asked Corson.

Mr. Medium nodded. "One for secret police headquarters, one for Hans and his friends and one for the spaceport."

As Corson and Mr. Medium covered their mouths with the masks, the bombs exploded by magnetic impulse a thousand feet up. Frail streamers of almost white smoke spread out in umbrella-like patterns, filling a third of the sky. Sleep was on the way for the unprepared, and would not be long in coming.

Downstairs in the courtyard, motors roared into life and heavy covered trucks nudged their way out of the compound. Not a motion was wasted. Strong hands gathered up the members of Hans von Schwann's headquarters battalion, stowed them like cordwood in the trucks, and tossed their belongings in on top of them. The trucks rolled on, this time to the spaceport, where the still-unconscious plotters had been strapped into gravity seats on two great

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spaceliners, already loaded with their female complements.

Before any member of the von Schwann group groped his way back to consciousness, the spaceliners *H. G. Wells* and *Jules Verne* were already a quarter of the way up the scale to the speed of light. Steady, hour-after-hour eight-gravity acceleration, I am told, prolongs the effects of sleep-bombs.

Some of the better-informed members of this little-informed class may recall that the first settlements on the planets of Sirius and Procyon, nine and ten light years away, were something in the nature of penal colonies. Despite that, they have proved enormously successful and Terence Costigan has been a conscientious and democratic president. Von Schwann, of course, did not reach the new world. He was killed in an attempted mutiny when the *Jules Verne* was two years out.

With the loss of its leadership, the European movement collapsed. The Committee found data which made the destruction of von Schwann's fellocrene-bulb plants the work of a mere week or so. It was then able to continue its work of undermining and eventually overthrowing the World Government at Bokhara.

Are there any questions? My dear young lady, you shock me. I had realized that this class had learned virtually nothing in the alleged schools of Terra but I must say that the full dimensions of your truly monumental ignorance are only gradually becoming clear. My numbed mind resists the awful truth.

"C-173, my dear, was an emotional codeword for robots. Do you understand what an emotional codeword is? . . . Then I must explain. The early attempts to make emotionless robots failed. The human mind, it seems, rebels at strict logic. With our natures, we are uncomfortable with sheer mentality. We need the lubrication of emotion. So robots were given thalami as well as cortices. Don't bother to hold up your hand, my dear. I shall explain. The emotions are lodged in the thalamus, which is part of the brain.

Goelet, the inventor, next solved the problem of what kind of emotions to give the robots. He decided that the emotions of the robot should be as close as possible to those of the master. To do this, he used codewords. If you spoke the correct codeword, the inner nature of the robot became the same as yours.

Maria, you see, was not human. She was one of the first successful Goelet robots. When Moore and Corson met her, the last person to speak her codeword had been von Schwann. Since he was a slimy character, so was she.

In keeping his vow to dispose of Moore's murderer, Corson was not obliged to kill her; only to disassemble her.

Class dismissed.

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fair exchange

by . . . Mack Reynolds

The man from the future was a real Santa Claus when it came to bargains. But he took his trade into dangerous regions.

"AND NOW," the chairman beamed, "I give you Doctor Warren Cody, the conqueror of the mosquito, the house fly, the flea, and the louse. Gentlemen, I give you mankind's greatest benefactor."

Warren Cody came to his feet in embarrassment, his eyes self-consciously averted as the waves of applause broke over him.

When at last the applause subsided he said, "I don't deserve this, and I must tell you why. The time has come to explain the disappearance of the insect enemies which have plagued mankind for so long." He hesitated, then said almost pleadingly, "Let me tell you a story."

The convention settled back, anticipating an allegory in an amusingly imaginative vein.

"A month ago," Cody said, "a time traveler appeared one night in my study."

His audience chuckled, and someone called out: "Hear, hear!"

"I will not attempt to describe my shocked disbelief," Cody went on quickly. "Suffice to say that he offered me a demonstration of the advanced science of his own period

If a man from the future should offer to make you healthy, wealthy and wise in exchange for a handful of coins would you rejoice in your good fortune? You'd better think twice before you decide. In this chill, tiny fable Mack Reynolds reveals just how terrifyingly misleading such generosity can be.

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in return for a hundred dollars. As I say, I was wholly incredulous. I told him that if he was actually from the future his race would have solved the problem of the elimination of the mosquito. He assured me that they had and that he would return the following night with the method. He did, and I paid him in new coins as he requested."

The convention chairman allowed himself another chuckle.

Cody went on. "He offered then to reveal such further information as I might desire in return for forty thousand francs in French coins. I suppose that no one would blame me for remaining in my own rut—keeping my requests within the limits of my own scientific field. I asked him to provide me with a formula for ridding Earth of the common house fly. The following day I obtained the francs from a money exchange house in New York.

"To shorten the story, gentlemen, in succession he provided me with information which enabled me to rid the world of the fly, the mosquito, the louse and the flea. In turn I paid him in American, French, British and German currency, all of which I obtained from the exchange house."

The chairman seemed annoyed by Cody's delay in getting to the point. He said, "And this time traveler— What in the world did he want with the money of this era, Doctor Cody?"

The speaker took a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his forehead. "He—he was a numismatist, gentlemen. Evidently a fanatic at his hobby. He was willing to grant any knowledge in return for the coins he wished."

"Incredible!" someone said.

The chairman still didn't understand. But surely somewhere here there was a point. He said, "But why did you stop? Having rid the world of insect pests, why did you not exchange further foreign currencies for more scientific information?"

Cody wiped his forehead again. "At the exchange, I was no longer able to secure the currencies he wanted. They didn't carry *that* kind of money. They hadn't for a good many years."

There was a deep silence throughout the convention hall.

Doctor Warren Cody said, "Gentlemen, what worries me is, when he contacts someone behind the Iron Curtain, what information is he going to trade in return for rubles?"

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the far-off stars

by . . . Ruth Sterling

The old man waited just a split second too long. But every new Eden must start with a mistake.

THE GREAT day was at hand. The old man watched the gyromobile hover above him and sink to the ground near the white pasture rail. His son leaped out and ran into the house shouting, "Let's go—everybody. We're ready to leave!"

The old man sighed. He had lived so long that he could never quite forget that he would soon die. Could he believe what they had told him? Was it really true that he would not die on Earth? With his gnarled hands resting on his knees, he continued to sit on the rock peering at the strange sight in the valley below.

From everywhere they came, out of the sky, along the distant roads —a countryside alive with men, women, children, rushing as if magnetized to the great shape of glittering steel rising like a giant bullet on the flat, dead meadows. The world over humanity was packing the silver ships with food, clothing, books, medicines, plant seed, smuggling in photographs, souvenirs, all the little foolish possessions they could not bear to leave behind.

"Father," the old man's daugh-

It is not easy for a young man to forsake his home and fireside for the shining immensities of space. But to an old man the emotional shock may be far more profound, and he may hesitate and draw back. There's a newness of approach, a lyrical intensity in this fine little story which we think you'll like.

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ter-in-law called from the doorway, "John wants you in this minute. You've got to change your clothes."

"I am coming," he answered.

But he did not rise. A light wind fanned across his weathered face. He looked up, blinking in bewilderment. At this time of the year the breeze should have played fitfully with a flock of leaves, sending them scurrying into the hollows and windy places. Why were the trees so unmoving?

"Grandfather, look at us!" Two children rushed out. They both wore plastic green coveralls, the voyage clothes. They clamped steel-blue helmets to their small heads and the old man could no longer tell which was the boy, and which the girl. They danced about, chanting:

We're going to Mars
We'll live near the stars
We'll zoom through the sky
We'll zoom very high.

I do not like that song, the old man thought.

"Father," his daughter-in-law called again, "aren't you *ever* coming in? There isn't much time."

Time, the old man wondered. What did time mean now? Time had meant pale buds deepening, a sapling grown sturdy and tall, the scent of blossoms, leaves turning from green to russet and withering to fall and grow again. Time was not the pall which lay over the land. The Earth still turned, but it was as barren and as useless as the old man himself.

Today, time meant only an eternity of patience, shared by the scientists as they waited for Mars to move its closest to Earth. It happened every sixteen years and it was happening now and all men thanked their gods in secret. They could not have waited another year.

Already the stores of food were dangerously low and death by starvation had thinned out half of humanity. And so they waited and prayed, the ones who survived. They waited until each government announced, "It is time. Now we can leave."

From what inner flame had that kindling of determination arisen? A dream—a desperate prayer that life would continue, that seeds which could not germinate on Earth would blossom on the strange, distant planet Mars.

The old man shook his gray head as he walked toward the house. For himself, it did not matter too much. But what of his grandchildren and the generations still unborn? Their future must be made secure.

What madness had possessed the scientists to create so destructive a chemical? He remembered the newspaper articles, of five years before, explaining how the dreadful substance worked. It destroyed chlorophyll. No photosynthesis was possible. It was a weapon more deadly than any atomic bomb.

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Then had come the Universal War and the frightening discovery that the enemy possessed the chemical too. So the earth was sprayed from pole to pole and as the scientists had predicted, all vegetable life withered and died.

Too late the warmakers cried: "Enough! Enough!"

And when the farmers went back to plow their fields they found that the earth was so poisoned that not a seedling would grow. Grazing animals became bony and died. Frantically, the farmers plowed and hoed and cursed the land while the scientists ate and slept in the laboratories, searching in vain for some way to create a living cell. The gardens of the oceans were brought to land and planted. But whatever was put into the ground, remained there, buried. And so at last the World Council met and decided the human race must leave the Earth.

When he was young, the old man recalled how people would say, "We can split the atom but we cannot cure the common cold." These days they said, "We can travel to Mars, but we cannot create food."

He stood up and walked inside, to quarreling and tears.

His son was tossing things out of suitcases and boxes while his daughter-in-law wept. "You're cruel, cruel. The patchwork quilt . . . it was my mother's. And our wedding silver, John! Oh, John . . ."

"My dolly," the little girl screamed. "I want my singing dolly!"

"My space gun, my telescope, my flying horse! Daddy, please . . ."

"No, no, no. There is no room. I am not heartless . . ." He turned white-faced to his father. "And you? What is it you want to drag along?"

"Nothing."

"Fine. Would you please put on your coveralls?" He looked at his wristwatch. "My God, do you realize we've got to be out of here in five minutes? We've got to be fingerprinted and checked in, hundreds of us, all in the next hour. The take-off has been timed down to the second. *Hurry!*"

He began slamming shut the luggage, rushing back and forth from the gyromobile, shouting orders to his distraught wife and children.

No one noticed the old man slip out the back door. He wandered among the sapless, decayed trees, remembering orchards of apples, pears, cherries, the smell of lilacs, of mint. And as he wandered on, a strangeness overcame him, leading him, tempting him back to the days of his youth. Voices came to his ears, real, more real than the voices calling him now.

He heard the young, sweet voice of his wife. "Andrew, where are you?" And he saw her running

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toward him with the sunlight on her hair. He swung about, hearing also the cry of his first-born who had died in the Universal War.

"Father, father, come quickly!"

Suddenly the old man looked up, bewildered. The cemetery. Had he wandered this far? Trembling, leaning against the grilled iron gate, his body shook with sobs, and as he wept the pain in his heart was cleansed from him. This was where he belonged—here, beyond the gate where his ancestors, his wife, his friends rested. It was blasphemy to think of leaving them behind. Blasphemy . . .

He heard a great roar, an explosion that rocked the ground and thundered against his ear drums. Startled, he looked up, then remembered. The ship! It was leaving without him.

No matter. He had not wanted to go. There was too much of his life buried here, calling to him. His wife had called. He turned and found her grave and knelt beside it, his eyes closed as he whispered to her.

He opened his eyes and was about to rise when he saw the delicate, green tendril pushing upward from the mound of her grave. For an instant the old man stared at it. Then with trembling fingers he reached out and touched it. It was real—real.

He sprang to his feet and shouted to the sky where the silver ship grew smaller and smaller, "Wait! Wait! Don't leave! The earth . . ." His body slackened. "The earth," he said softly, "has given birth again."

Was it a miracle? But there were growing things bursting from the ground everywhere. He ran out of the cemetery, over greenness, back to the empty house and gazed down into the valley now so empty of people but dotted here and there with little islands of grass.

What had done it? The special gases from the fuel of the spaceship? Was it happening all over the world? And were there others, someone in China, in Africa, who had stayed behind?

Tears rolled down the old man's cheeks, but these were tears of joy. He raised himself to his full height, feeling the strength of his youth flow through his veins again. For sheer joy, he laughed aloud, breathing in the new sweetness of the air. He was no longer useless. For as long as he continued to live—a day, a month—he would work, he would plow, he would plant.

This was his destiny. This was why he had remained behind.

And someday, when those who survived on Mars looked longingly into the sky, maybe . . maybe they would see a star glittering sapphire once again and know it was time to go home.

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the only conqueror

by . . . Norman Arkawy

In that grim tomorrow, dominated by hate and rage, there could be only one shining path to victory.

PETER KOROVITCH studied the menu carefully for a moment. Then he snapped it shut and ordered his usual lunch—a cheese sandwich and a cup of tea.

He looked casually around the little lunchroom at the other late diners, speculating as to the nature of their work and why they had delayed their midday meal until two-thirty in the afternoon. Of one thing he was certain. None of them was, like himself, a fugitive patriot.

At the far end of the counter a short man with graying hair and silver-rimmed eyeglasses sat hunched into a brown leather jacket, wolfing a sandwich held in grimed, work-roughened hands. Two seats nearer, a thin youngster waited for an order of herring and baked potatoes. While he waited he nibbled daintily at a slice of pumpernickel.

Next to him a dark-haired girl, about twenty-five, was having a hamburger and coffee. She would have been pretty, Peter decided, if her hair had been combed properly and if she did not have the typical pasty complexion of an office worker.

Norman Arkawy has written many stories of the human spirit, unconquerable as star flame, in the gulfs between the planets. But there's an even steadier glow of understanding triumphant in this moving story of war's aftermath on Earth. It takes a prophetic pen to depict so boldly history in the making.

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Abruptly the counter girl slid his sandwich and tea in front of him. With a sigh Peter took his last fourteen ORs from his pocket and tossed twelve of them on the counter.

"I'm sorry, sir," the counter girl said, "but new prices are in effect today. That'll be thirteen rubles, please."

Peter sighed in disgusted resignation and handed her another ruble. He looked mournfully at the solitary bill remaining in his hand, the black-stamped OCCUPATION CURRENCY defacing the portrait of Nikolay Lenin. *Poor Nikolay,* Peter thought. *Poor Peter!* He folded the bill neatly into a small square and tucked it into his pocket.

He picked up his sandwich and bit into it. He ate slowly, savoring the taste and texture of the food, and telling himself that this particular sandwich must be a feast which he would long remember. He had no idea when he would eat again.

"Damned Americans!" he said. It was meant to be a whisper—a completely inaudible, muttered whisper. But the words rang loudly in the tiny lunchroom.

Peter was just as surprised at the sound of his voice as were the other people grouped along the counter. Momentary fear panicked him, and he could not swallow the bread and cheese which filled his mouth. He sat rigidly on the stool.

"It's all right," the pasty-faced girl said. "You're among friends." She smiled at him—bravely but without much conviction.

The gray-haired man glanced nervously over his hunched shoulder through the glass front of the restaurant. He looked up Probiloff Street to the two MPs standing on the corner.

The thin boy turned to Peter, his eyes gleaming with a startling intensity. "Take heart, comrade," he urged. "Have patience. It won't be long now."

He leaned forward and lowered his voice. "I have a short wave set," he confided. "With it I pick up the government's broadcasts from Siberia. Do not fear, comrade. They have not forgotten us! The Americans will be driven from our homeland by the end of the year!"

"I know," Peter scoffed, his composure returning along with his cynicism. "But by then I'll have long since starved to death!"

The thin boy's gaze traveled the full length of Peter's husky body. "You don't look undernourished to me, comrade," he jibed, a little enviously. Then, in a more serious tone, he repeated: "Have patience."

"Patience!" The short man leaned over the counter, frowning pugnaciously. "For eight years we've been told to exercise patience. When the war started a decade ago they said it would all be over in six months. Then, when the Americans invaded, they told us: 'Be patient. The Americans

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will be driven out of Russia just as were all the other invaders before them.' Now, eight years later, they still tell us to be patient!"

"The government knows what it's doing!" the thin youngster insisted. "Our leaders have to consider the war in its global aspects —not just how it affects us here at home. And the reports from overseas are very encouraging."

He laughed scornfully. "The American soldiers may parade in our streets, but while they strut about like so many roosters our armies are conquering one outpost after another all over the world. They are preparing for the big push. When the time is right they will launch an offensive and liberate the homeland. Then the war will be won! And the time is near, comrades. Ah!" he sighed fervently. "You should have heard the broadcast last night!"

Peter laughed derisively. "Ah!" he mimicked, "but the broadcasts don't put money in my pocket or food in my stomach."

"They do not!" the gray-haired man echoed. "While our great leaders keep telling us how soon they are going to liberate us from the Americans my children go to the American school and get filled with Yankee propaganda! My own children are already more American than some of those soldiers out there." He flung out his arm toward the street in a gesture of impatience.

"Do not worry, papa," the young man said smugly, "they will be re-educated after the liberation."

Peter could not conceal his contempt for the cocky youngster's optimism. How much longer would the occupation last? How long was a lifetime?

He finished his lunch in silence and pushed the dishes away. He longed for a cigarette, but realized it would be quite as sensible to wish for champagne and caviar. A slight, rueful smile accompanied his thoughts.

"Anything else, comrade?" the counter girl called to him from her seat by the window.

"Yes, please," Peter quipped, "a few hundred rubles on rye."

The girl did not appear to think the remark amusing. She turned back to the glass front of the restaurant and resumed her watch upon the street for unwelcome visitors.

"You have no money?" the girl with the pale cheeks asked gently. "Don't you have a job?"

Peter shook his head. A sardonic smile touched his lips. "The firm I was with went out of business last week. And there aren't many openings for men in my profession any more."

"What kind of work do you do?" the girl asked innocently.

"My last employment," he said, trying to sound casual, "was with the Fighters for Liberty."

The thin young man almost spilled his tea. "The guerillas?" he gasped.

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Peter nodded grimly. "That's right. And you may as well know that the 'lies' the Americans have been telling you about the destruction of the Fighters are not lies at all. They happen to be true. So I'm out of work and—" He broke off with a laugh. "Do you think the Americans would be able to find some work for me to do in my particular field of specialization?"

The young man laughed too, but the man in the brown jacket fidgeted uneasily with his wristwatch. In the corner of the window the counter girl swung about again and stared steadily at Peter with a new respect.

"What are you going to do now?" the pale girl asked.

"Do?" Peter shrugged. "Who knows? I'll have to get me some identification papers first. Then maybe I'll find some nice peaceful occupation—" his voice became thick and bitter. "Perhaps I can become a houseboy in the American officers' quarters!"

"You have no papers?" The girl did not attempt to hide her concern.

"You're an utter fool!" the young man exclaimed. There was no trace of laughter in his voice now, only contempt. "Why did you come here if you haven't any papers? Don't you know that this town is crawling with soldiers?"

Peter shrugged. "A man must eat. Besides," he said sadly, "there comes a time when you can run no further; when you must stop running."

The girl's smile was comforting. She no longer seemed to be frightened. "I will help you, comrade," she said. "I have the confidence and respect of a person who can arrange such things. And, comrade—do not hate the Americans so. They are not all bad."

"They are detestable barbarians!" Peter said, a bitter hatred in his stare. "They destroyed Moscow and Kiev and Leningrad and Minsk."

"It is the war," the girl said gently. "Our bombs brought destruction to their cities, too. But you and I as individuals did not drop the bombs and the American soldiers over here are not responsible for their country's attack on us. It is just the war."

Peter shook his head vehemently. He turned his face away to hide tears of frustration and rage.

"They have been here for eight years," the girl went on, "and they have not done anything terrible to us. We are no worse off than before, when our own troops were here."

"Yes, but there is a great difference between enduring hardship for the good of our own people and making the same sacrifices to help the enemy!"

"But hate is self-destructive."

The thin boy looked at the girl suspiciously. "You had better be careful how you talk, comrade," he warned. "Soon the Americans will

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be driven out. When the liberation comes we will know how to deal with collaborators!"

The girl's pale face grew even whiter, but her reply was cut off abruptly by the counter girl's warning cry: "Here come some American soldiers—with cigarettes!"

Once more genuine alarm seized the girl. She grabbed Peter's arm and tugged urgently. "You have no papers," she exclaimed. "Quick! Into the kitchen!"

Peter moved fast. He descended from his stool and hurried toward the back of the restaurant. But just as he reached the end of the counter the door of the lunchroom opened and two burly MPs stepped inside.

Peter froze. Hopeless resignation drained him of all energy, and he dropped despairfully onto the last stool and sat very still. Lifeless, except for the wild thumping of his pulse, he waited.

The Americans closed the door firmly behind them and stood with their legs spread apart, and their arms folded across their chests like two colossi guarding a roomful of frightened conspirators. Slowly, they surveyed the room, their eyes pausing momentarily on each seated individual as they traveled the full length of the counter. There was not a sound to be heard in the place.

The face of one of the soldiers broadened in a grin. "I don't think the Russkys like us, Joe."

His companion grunted and moved to the counter. The first soldier followed. They ordered coffee.

Peter stared down at his hands. They were intertwined on the counter before him, the knuckles of his fingers white where they had gripped each other in tight restraint. He waited, and listened to the Americans' loud voices.

"Hey!" the first soldier said, "this babe's not a bad looker, Joe." He moved nearer to the white-faced girl. "How about it, honey . . . just you and me?" He winked at her, a wide grin on his lips.

"Lay off it, Fred!" his companion said.

Fred swung about, the grin still on his face. "Why, Joe? Friendliness is the least these Russky dames can show us conquering heroes!" He turned back to the girl.

Joe seized his arm and jerked him away. "I told you to knock it off! Now you listen to me and you'll stay out of trouble! You damn replacements from the States come over here and right away you think you're oriental despots or somethin'!"

Fred's face grew hard. "I haven't been in the States in six years," he said bitterly. "You know that!"

"All right," Joe conceded, "Brazil then. That's from the States as far as I'm concerned! You guys come over here expecting to sit on a raised platform and have oriental dancing girls wait on you hand and foot. You'd think you

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were undisputed conquerors, demanding the spoils of conquest!

"Well, bud, the war isn't over and we haven't conquered anybody. You'd better not forget it! We're on occupation duty here, and our orders—"

"Aw, you make me sick! Why haven't you got yourself assigned to I and E, or the chaplain's office?"

Joe grinned. "You'll see the light, Freddie boy. You'd better, or you'll get yourself shipped out so fast your pants'll be scorched by the jets."

"Don't get the idea *that* worries me!" Fred boasted.

"Oh? Where would you like to be sent—the Siberian front, the Congo, North Canada? Or maybe the Mexican beachhead. They got all the comforts of home down there! Wise up, bud. You're on the best duty in this man's army."

Peter watched the two soldiers lounging against the counter. He listened to their heated conversation and felt only contempt for the American debating society that called itself an army. A long-dormant sense of pride in the martial perfection of the Red Army expanded within him. It gave him a giddy feeling. He had no doubt, at that moment, of the ultimate victory of his homeland's forces.

He was sure that the American soldiers were too busy arguing to be concerned if an inconspicuous civilian, having finished his meal, should decide to leave the lunchroom. Once they got into one of their interminable discussions the bumbling fools would not even notice Marshal Malov if he sat down next to them! Peter permitted himself the luxury of an unseen sneer. He slid off his stool and walked to the door—slowly, casually.

His hand had just barely touched the doorknob when the American named Fred called out to him. Peter dropped his hand to his side, and turned in bitter resignation.

"Come here, Russky!"

Peter went over to the Americans. He felt empty, defeated. He had reached the end of eight years of fighting and running away, and now it was over. He was trapped.

He looked up into the big blond American's face, and he saw his own hatred and revulsion mirrored in the MP's eyes.

"Where do you think you're going, Russky? Don't you know it's not polite to walk out until we say it's okay?"

"Leave him alone, Fred," the one called Joe said.

"Let's see your papers," Fred demanded, ignoring his friend's warning.

"I said knock it off!" Joe was angry. "Drink your goddamn coffee and keep your mouth shut!"

He gestured Peter toward the stool at his side, away from Fred. He smiled apologetically and offered him a cigarette.

Peter hesitated. He wanted the cigarette—wanted it so badly his throat felt parched. But one does

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not accept friendly offerings from a hated enemy.

"Go on," Joe urged in Russian, "have one."

Peter looked into the American's eyes—clear, unhating eyes that seemed to speak a mysterious language he could not understand. A conflict of emotions tormented him. He longed for the cigarette, but he could accept nothing from the murderous hands of an American. To a true patriot, such a surrender would be practically as bad as collaborating.

But the cigarette was tempting, with the firm white cylinder of tobacco protruding from a crisp pack, and he decided to accept it. He salved his conscience by telling himself that it was only prudent for him not to offend the MP by refusing.

Silently, he took the cigarette. The American struck a match and they lit up. Peter inhaled the smoke hungrily. He smoked rapidly, nervously, not knowing when his respite would end, but anticipating disaster at any moment. They had him. He was a prisoner.

"Relax," Joe said. "You're among friends." His smile was easy and ingenuous, almost naive. No, not naive. "It's all right," he said quietly. "Some of these newcomers don't understand, but I know how it is. I have a brother back in the States."

HANK ROBERTSON studied the menu carefully, then closed it and ordered his usual lunch—ham on rye and coffee. He looked around the little luncheonette at the other diners and wondered, in an offhand way, what each of them did to make a living. The thought angered him. What, it really meant, were they assigned to do by the commies?

The waitress placed his order in front of him. Hank tossed four ODs on the counter.

"I'm sorry, sir," the waitress said, "but the new prices are in effect today. That'll be six dollars, please."

Hank cursed softly and handed her two more dollars. The extra charge left him only seven dollars for the rest of the week—and that meant no lunch on Saturday.

He looked mournfully at the money he held in his hand. A black stamp of Russian letters defaced the portrait of George Washington. *Poor George,* Hank thought. *Poor Hank!* He wished he were out there somewhere—in the fight like his brother Joe.

"Damned Russians!" he said angrily. The words rang out loudly in the small luncheonette.

Momentary panic seized Hank. He glanced nervously over his shoulder through the glass front of the restaurant, and up Main Street to the two MPs standing on the corner.

"It's all right," someone said quietly. "You're among friends."

Hank turned to the speaker—a jolly-faced man in a threadbare

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suit that was several sizes too small for him.

"It won't be long now, pal," the man said. He leaned forward and lowered his voice. "I have a short-wave set," he confided, "and I pick up the government's broadcasts from Rio." A confident smile of assurance shone earnestly in his eyes. "Don't worry, pal. They haven't forgotten us! And, according to what they say, the Russians will be kicked out by the end of the year."

"Kicked out?" Hank muttered. "That's not enough! We ought to kill 'em. Every one of them."

"YOU REMIND me of Hank," Joe said to Peter. "Of course, I haven't seen him for ten years. But still, as soon as I saw you, I said to myself, 'He looks like Hank.' "

Peter's blank stare of pretended interest could not hide his obvious failure to comprehend. Joe laughed softly, as at some private, unspoken joke.

"You would have liked him," he said.

A flicker of interest passed evanescently across Peter's face. He quickly disciplined his emotions, and his face set again in hard lines. "He was an American, your brother?"

Joe's humorless laugh puzzled the Russian. "You mean like me—or like Freddie here?" He did not wait for an answer. "Y'know," he reminisced sadly, "the last time I saw Hank was just before I shipped out. The Russian bombers had already done a pretty good job, and our folks—" He lowered his eyes and swallowed an unmanly human emotion.

"We were both so full of hate we could taste it. There was only one thing we wanted to live for—to kill Russians. We swore we'd kill every Russian we could. That's the Hank I remember. There once must have been another Hank—a loving Hank. But all I can remember is the hating."

Joe lit another cigarette. He tossed his pack on the counter and motioned to Peter to help himself. "I wonder how Hank feels about it now," he continued. "Just like you, I suppose."

"And how do you 'suppose' I feel?" Peter asked boldly, his voice tinged with scorn.

"As for me," Joe said quietly, ignoring the Russian's remark, "I don't hate any more."

His clear, unwavering eyes looked straight into Peter's, and Peter felt some of the hardness in his own eyes chip away. It frightened him, this strange power in the American's eyes. He turned away and gazed down at the floor.

"So?" he said, trying to sound cynical but failing completely and for the first time. The damn American was casting a spell over him! What *was* it he saw in the other's eyes?

"What's the sense of hating," Joe said. "Should we hate a river when there's a flood, or the rain

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which swells it and turns it from a life-giver to a destroyer? Should we hate the sun when we have a drought? And when we know the danger, and still we carelessly allow the river to sweep us away or the sun to burn us, should we hate ourselves?"

Confused, Peter looked up once more into the American's eyes. He recognized now the power—the tremendous power—that burned there with such a calm intensity. And through his confusion, Peter began to understand what that power signified.

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room for improvement

by . . . Mann Rubin

In a room where solitude reigns even the dead may find time to resent ancient, intolerable wrongs.

ALBERT WATKINS had been married a year before he discovered the room. He found it one rainy summer day under the hall stairs while seeking shelter for a dying geranium plant that had been spilled over by the rain and was now beyond repair. It was small and furnished comfortably with a mahogany desk, an easy chair, a library of several travel books and a window that looked out on a narrow cross-section of his garden.

He had seen the window many times in his excursions about the garden but somehow had never been curious about its precise location. Now the discovery came as a surprise. He left the plant under the desk, closed the door and made a mental note to ask his wife why she had never even so much as mentioned the room to him.

At the time Albert was forty-eight years of age, assistant manager at the Glenn City Bank and married to the former Elizabeth Towne Sumpter, the widow of his former employer. The late Mr. Sumpter had been a quiet-spoken,

From time to time we've brought you, with a great deal of gratification, the brilliant excursions into fantasy of up-and-coming young advertising writers, TV producer-directors and TV script writers. We don't know why, exactly, but fantasy seems to beckon with unusual persuasiveness to men and women in the vanguard, so to speak, of our modern age. And here with an eerily compelling magic at his fingertips comes Mann Rubin to add a new dimension to this phenomenon and imprison us within walls of strangeness in his own way.

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diligent man to work for and Albert had always admired his ways.

Albert had courted and won Elizabeth after two years of subdued, respectful wooing. She had always seemed a mild, well-mannered woman, not unattractive, who could share contentedly and without fuss the life of a calm, unhurried dreamer like Albert Watkins.

Immediately after the wedding the newlyweds had taken up their residence at the old Sumpter house on Belmont Street. Almost at once the magic had fallen away. Elizabeth, in reality, was a shrew—a lean, scolding argument of a woman who never let him forget his deficiencies, his mistakes or his failures. After only a month Albert realized he was sentenced to live in a home where he was constantly overshadowed by the memory of his predecessor.

The house was filled with the name, the fame and the souvenirs of George Sumpter. His pictures hung everywhere: George Sumpter, student; George Sumpter, college graduate; George Sumpter, bridegroom. But the most treasured of Elizabeth's possessions, and to Albert the one most scarring, was the small silver urn which stood so majestically and bright in the living room beneath a large picture of George Sumpter, Odd Fellow.

The urn contained her late husband's ashes and was referred to once in every day either by word or gesture as a shrine of greatness. She kept it polished and glistening in the center of the mantelpiece over the fireplace and never let Albert forget the giant of a man it had once represented.

But on this particular night, the night of his discovery, Albert was too excited by curiosity to allow his wife's routine to bother him. They were sitting in the living room. Albert had just finished the paper and was thinking about the small room again when she got up to do her nightly polishing.

"By the way, I discovered a secret of yours while you were out shopping," said Albert calmly.

"What secret?" she asked suspiciously.

"The room under the staircase," he said. "Why didn't you ever tell me about it? I could work on my plants there."

"You stay out," she said turning on him furiously. "That room's not for you. It was George's den. I don't want you snooping around it. I don't even go in myself. You keep away."

That was all. She stared him down and Albert returned to his newspaper in tight-lipped silence. He didn't even tell her about the plant he had left inside. Tomorrow he would pick it up when she wasn't around. They exchanged no further words the rest of the evening. She continued with her polishing and Albert did a crossword puzzle. Then it was time for bed.

Albert didn't remember the plant until two nights later. It was

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Wednesday evening and Elizabeth had gone off to visit friends. He was passing the stairs when he recalled the room and what he had left there. When he opened the door and switched on a light he thought he had made a mistake. The floor was a lace-work of green leaves and geranium buds.

Albert could hardly believe his eyes. When he had left the plant it had been crushed and practically in shreds. Now it was blossoming in rich, velvet colors.

Albert studied the room, but nothing else had changed. Bewilderedly he carried the plant to the sun porch and returned it to its regular position on the window-sill. Later when Elizabeth came home she commented on the beauty of the new flower and asked him when he had found time to buy it.

But the sight of the healthy, flourishing plant made a far deeper impression on Albert Watkins. In the next few days, by guile and subterfuge, he was able to extract from Elizabeth bit by bit more information concerning the room. It had been George Sumpter's private den. He had built and furnished it himself and would go in at the end of the day to meditate and read. He called it his room for improvement and permitted no one to enter or clean it except in his presence. Occasionally, over week-ends, he would spend two or three hours alone inside the cubicle. Always when he emerged Elizabeth found him to be a new man.

At the same time as he gathered these stray pieces, Albert did not forget the strange phenomenon he had witnessed. Secretly he'd deposit other withered, dying plants in the room for an overnight stay. Each time on his return visit he was greeted by the same amazing spectacle. The plant would be miraculously giving forth vivid, sweeping blossoms completely at variance with its previous condition.

Alone, Albert would study the room for some secret force, some mystic pressure valve or button capable of turning the bare, unadorned chamber into such a tropical, thriving greenhouse. He could find nothing.

It was on the following Saturday that the next unusual event occurred. Elizabeth, after getting him up early and bawling him out for his behavior at a dinner party the night before, left to do her week-end shopping. Albert was alone. He had been waiting for just such an opportunity for some time. This was the morning he'd promised himself a thorough inspection of the room from top to bottom. He was going to search every plank, every wall until he found the secret source of energy that produced such startling floral effects.

Albert entered the room slowly and with the humbleness of a man who was keenly aware that he stood before a power mightier than himself. He examined the cubicle again, waiting for a sound or smell

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or touch that might with luck indicate the presence of the unknown stimulator.

Carefully, Albert set down a small Mignonette plant he'd discovered that morning to be in a sorry condition—parched and rotting from a leaf fungus. The Mignonette plant was to be his patient, and this time his eyes would follow every transformation and change that took place.

Just as he put the plant in position and was about to settle back for the experiment he heard the back door open and his name being called. Almost immediately he recognized the voice as belonging to Eddie Wilson, a young neighbor of sixteen who lived in the house next door. Young Wilson had found Albert to be a good listener and frequently came to visit and chat about his feats of agility and strength as the local high school athletic hero.

As soon as Albert heard the door slam he tried to hurry into the hall and close off the room. He was too late. The boy saw him just as he was hiding the Mignonette in a corner, and came into the room slowly, his usual rush and enthusiasm no longer with him.

"Hi, Mr. Watkins," he said, with a puzzled stare. "What are you doing in here? I've never seen this place before."

"It's just a store-room," said Albert quickly and nervously, shielding the plant with his body. "I don't use it too often."

The boy came deeper into the room, his eyes taking in all the furnishings. "It ain't much," he said. "Is it?"

"No, it's not," said Albert, relieved.

He felt suddenly convinced that there would be no trouble, no need of explanations. He started for the door, but the boy didn't follow. For the first time Albert noticed that he was limping and that from beneath the cuff of his left trouser leg a layer of bandages protruded.

"What happened to your leg?" Albert asked.

"I sprained my ankle—fractured it, I think. Yesterday at basketball practice. I had X-rays taken. I'm out for the rest of the season."

Albert expressed his sorrow.

The boy sat down. "That's not the worst. Tonight we're playing Caterville for the State Championship. What a blow. They were depending on me."

Albert expressed his further regrets and once again tried to indicate that he was closing the room. The boy took no heed. He had settled himself in the easy chair, his leg stretched out before him, and was describing his injury in detail.

Albert listened sympathetically, nodding at proper intervals and shaking his head sadly when the story reached its tragic climax. All the while he watched the plant furtively for the first sign of a sudden sprouting that would have

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given away all he didn't want known.

At last the boy finished and shifted restlessly as if wanting to leave. Albert watched him gratefully. Out of the corner of his eye he had seen what he believed to be the green movement of a bud unfolding. The boy's exit was just in time.

"What a blow," the boy repeated. He stood up dishearteningly and shuffled toward the door. Albert put a hand on his shoulder as a final gesture of sympathy and good will and walked with him for possibly eight paces.

Suddenly both of them realized that something had changed. The boy's limp was no longer visible. He had risen and walked in a natural gait almost to the door. Now he had stopped and was looking down at his ankle in amazement.

Albert was the first to speak. "What is it? *What's the matter with your leg?*"

"I don't know," said the boy. "My limp is gone! There's no pain any more."

He let out a yell of delight and spun around to face Albert. He began pacing back and forth quickly, shaking, experimenting, jumping on the still bandaged leg.

Albert tried to restrain him. "You'd better slow down, Eddie. Remember it's fractured. The X-rays proved it! That's what you said—"

"Not any more," laughed Eddie joyously. "It must have snapped back into place all by itself. Just while I was sitting here. Look, look what I can do." By this time there was little chance of holding him down. He was running and jumping about the room, throwing imaginary basketballs into imaginary baskets on all four walls.

"I can play. I can play tonight. I've got to call the coach." Grabbing Albert's hand he shook it warmly and raced out the door with all the old spirit and zest that Albert remembered as characteristic of him.

Albert remained motionless for a long moment. For the first time he grasped the full, staggering, terrifying power of the room. It was true, he told himself. It truly was a room for improvement. Not only for flowers, but possibly for any object—human or inanimate—that was impaired, injured or broken. He imagined there was nothing it could not heal.

That night at dinner Albert hardly spoke at all. He was lost deep within himself and the words and criticisms which Elizabeth flung at him bounced off harmlessly. She was particularly bitter because she had met some friends during the day and discovered that she was the only one in her social circle who would not be wearing a new Spring coat for Easter. The humiliation had crushed her.

All through the meal and afterwards when they were again seated in the living room she kept after him, never letting him forget his

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meager position in life and the miserable circumstances he was forcing her to live under.

Promptly at ten-thirty she brought out her silver-polish and her brush and commenced to perform her nightly function, comparing the bright, high elegance of her first husband's vault to the dim, tarnished life she now shared with a failure.

Albert watched her—this woman who had made his life so crowded and so small for a full year. Dimly he was aware that she was still scolding him for his insignificant status. As he studied her, her ranting became more cutting, her looks more intolerable, and slowly the idea began to germinate. It turned in his mind like a flank of beef on a spit, and he didn't let it go until it was crisp and cooked and ready to be served.

She finished her polishing and returned the urn to its regular position on the mantel. Her touch was gentle, loving, something Albert had never known.

"Well," she said at last, "what are you gaping at, sitting there like a grinning idiot?"

"Nothing, dear," he said, smiling weakly.

"What are you going to do about a Spring coat?" she demanded. "I'm not taking no for an answer. *I want something done.*"

"I'll do something," Albert said reassuringly. "You have my promise."

She glanced at him for a moment, puzzled by his mild complacency and willingness. Then she started for the stairs. "You'd better," she warned. "You'd just better."

When she reached the first step she stopped and looked back at him as if to make certain of her complete authority. "Turn out the lights," she said. "It's after eleven. I'm going to bed."

"Yes, dear," said Albert quietly. "Just let me finish the papers."

He watched her climb the stairs heavily until he couldn't see her any more. Then he heard her door close. He stayed in his chair for a long while. The house became still—everything tucked in for the night. After a time he stood up and walked to the urn. He had never touched it before. But now as he lifted it and carried it silently toward the room he could not remember ever holding anything that felt so cold and lifeless in all his life.

When he opened the door to the room he was greeted by the warm, pungent aroma of earth and roots and new buds. He placed the urn on the desk. In the half light coming from the hall lamp it appeared like a small silver flower ready to burst with blossoms. He watched it for a long minute, then stepped back and closed the door silently behind him. He was shivering.

"What's keeping you?" called the voice from upstairs. "What are

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you doing? My back hurts. I want you to massage it."

"In a minute," said Albert calmly.

He was back in the living room switching off one of the lamps. As its glow vanished he moved to a corner deep in the shadows where he could watch the door. He was perspiring freely. The house was suddenly more quiet than he had ever known it to be. He wondered how long it would take.

He heard the first sound in less than a minute—a soft metallic click as if a small lock were being pried open. Distant it seemed—and unreal. At first he thought his ears might be playing a trick on him, but after a moment the scratching sound came again, this time louder. Albert pushed himself deeper into his corner and wiped the perspiration from his face.

From upstairs the voice came again, breaking into the quiet. "Where are you? Get up here at once. Who do you think you are?"

"Another minute," Albert called back, not caring now whether she heard him or not. His throat was suddenly very tight as if no further sounds could escape from it. He listened again. The noise beyond the door was constant now. Something fell and crashed heavily against the floor. It rattled. Then there was silence.

The silence did not stay long. The doorknob creaked slightly and then began to turn. Albert pressed further into the darkness, his eyes straining for the first glimpse of whatever visitor was about to emerge.

The first thing Albert saw was the small cloud of smoke. It coiled out dark and lazy, hanging like a thin black curtain across the open doorway. It drifted toward him carrying the smell of burnt metal and long-forgotten ash. For a moment the smell seemed to permeate the entire house. It burned through Albert's nostrils until he wanted to scream. Every fibre of himself went numb as the stench reached deep into him and tore away all calm, all reserve, all strength. He tried to force his head to turn, to close his eyes and melt into the wall itself. But he was too late.

The hand emerged slowly. It was a hand—yet it was a lump. It had fingers and a palm, but its color was charcoal and its movement was that of something shapeless and dead. It moved out of the darkness gropingly, uncertainly, as if the light of the hallway was less real to it than the blackness from whence it had come. It paused.

From upstairs the bedroom door opened and the shrill voice of Elizabeth Towne Sumpter bellowed again. "You've had your last warning. I'm not standing for any more nonsense. I'll show you."

There was a soft click and the hall light was switched off. The house was plunged in darkness. Albert could see nothing. Some-

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where in front of him slow breathing sounds began. The visitor was moving from its place of birth.

"I don't want to have to tell you again," Elizabeth shouted. "When I give an order you listen. Put that paper away and get up here. You have my back to massage. Get up here."

Albert could feel the visitor hesitate, turn, wonder, as if recalling something from a long-forgotten past. Upstairs a door slammed angrily and vibrated through the corridor. The visitor hesitated a moment longer. Then Albert heard the low shuffle of feet moving slowly upstairs. Albert stayed with his back pressed tightly against the wall, hearing only the dull creak of each ascending step.

A black form moved through blackness and was gone. Albert counted off twelve steps and knew that the form had reached the landing. A moment later he heard a loud knock, followed by the exasperated scolding of his wife.

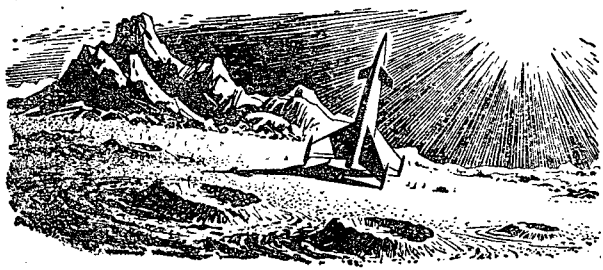
"It's about time," said Elizabeth. "Get in here. You'll find the liniment on the table."

The last sound Albert heard before the scream was the door opening. Then the door closed very quietly.

Albert Watkins did not know how long he remained in his corner. After a time a breeze came from somewhere and played against his face, making him feel suddenly alive and restless, making him feel as if a gate had opened wide on an unexpected turn in the road.

He moved to the hall closet and brought forth his coat and the walking stick he always carried when he planned to travel a long distance. He unlocked the front door and stepped out into the night.

Albert Watkins took a deep breath and started walking. The night was never more glorious.



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hail to the king

by . . . Edward Ludwig

The Devil's throne wasn't vacant exactly. A ghost sat there waiting to be filled out—by just the right shade of hellish purple!

MR. SCRATCH stepped onto the dais and raised his hands as if in a benediction. "Quiet, please!" he cried.

The murmuring continued, deep-boweled and sullen.

"Quiet!" he shouted into the amphitheatre which was illumined by flaming torches set in human skulls. "We must choose our King!"

There was a turning of monstrous heads, a swishing of pointed tails, a blinking of fiery eyes. At last silence fell upon the sea of devils.

Mr. Scratch wrinkled his nose as a wisp of smoke bearing the odor of charred flesh drifted past his nostrils. Then he smiled beneficently at his audience.

There were black devils and red devils and white devils, and devils with tails and horns and wings. There were invisible devils and devils in human form. There were also devils the size of mastodons and devils the size of pinheads.

"We are here," intoned Mr. Scratch, "to select a King." He indicated the vacant Throne of Flame

There's a fine literary flavor about this small yarn which we liked immensely the instant we set eyes on it. Out of the revolving spindle of flame on our desk where it reposed arose the ghosts of Edgar Allan Poe, Hawthorne, Algernon Blackwood and even Kit Marlowe (he who died in a tavern brawl so long ago!) —glorious masters of the macabre all. Indeed, we'd probably be tempted to add Edward Ludwig's name to the list, if we thought for a moment he'd approve!

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behind him. "As you know, each of us was born out of mankind's fear and shaped by its imagination. Unfortunately, perhaps, the human species has usually considered us as a single entity called Satan. It failed to realize that each interpretation of this entity resulted in a different diabolic creation.

"Now, which of all the imagined devils of mankind is the greatest? Which, of all those in man's legends, myths, writings, songs, should be our King? Our selection, of course, should be unanimous. Nominations?"

Mephistopheles stepped forward, tail switching, his naked flesh shining like fresh blood. "What devil is more famous than I? I and my counterparts have been in plays, books, even operas. Millions of humanity have shuddered beneath my gaze."

"I'm quite familiar with the story of *Faust*. But are you the Mephistopheles of Marlowe or Goethe or of an opera?"

Indignation flooded the grotesque features. "I'm Marlowe's, of course. You may remember my little trick of restoring Helen of Troy to life. If any other devil can equal—"

"No, no," murmured Mr. Scratch. "There are too many of you. I'm afraid we'd always be getting you mixed up. Am I not right?"

The assemblage nodded agreement.

A towering, flame-eyed creature pushed its way through a cluster of John Collier devils.

"And who are you?" asked Mr. Scratch.

"I am Sammael, first of all Hebrew devils. By virtue of my antiquity, I hereby claim the Throne of Flame."

"Oh, Heaven," swore Mr. Scratch. "You're old stuff. No one even remembers you any more. Who's next?"

A small personage, humanly shaped and clad in a tight-fitting swallow-tailed coat and black knee-britches, rose jauntily out of a mass of delegates from *Frightening Fiction Quarterly*. He paused dramatically to sniff at a golden snuff-box with his long, hooked nose.

Then, smoothing his mustachios, he declared, "The office of Kingship of the Devils, noble gentlemen, is one that requires a precise measure of dignity. Created by that master of the macabre, Edgar A. Poe, and featured in his immortal *The Devil in the Belfry*, I—"

The devils burst into raucous laughter.

Flushing, Poe's ludicrous Lucifer retreated into a group of grinning incubuses and disappeared behind a row of assorted Beelzebubs.

Next came fierce Asmodeus. "Surely *I* am your logical King. I was born in antiquity, appearing first in the Apocrypha. Yet my name has endured—"

He was interrupted by an Algernon Blackwood devil: "How about that escapade with the witch-

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demon Sarah—the gal who disposed of her seven husbands on their wedding nights? Really, a devil of such dubious taste in his amours would hardly qualify as King."

After a time, Mr. Scratch sighed. With a blood-filled pen, he checked name after name on his list of nominees.

He mused, "We've decided against Dante's Dis because to look upon a three-headed King for all eternity would be most monotonous. Milton's Lucifer is out—for to wade through that medieval verse to learn of his exploits would indeed be dreary. The devils of Hawthorne, Beerbohm, de Maupassant, Ben Jonson, and Cotton Mather are disqualified. How about Pluto of the ancient Romans?"

"Ridiculous," spat an Arabian Djinn, swirling up out of his bottle. "The guy actually gave wealth to those who worshipped him. Who ever heard of a true devil giving anything away?"

Mr. Scratch checked off the name, then hesitated. "Seth of the Egyptians—hmmmm. Body of an ass, ears and nose of a jackal. No, definitely not."

He went on: "And we've eliminated the devils of John Masefield, H. G. Wells, Anatole France, and Fredric Brown. Any more nominations?"

No answer.

"*Well,* then." His eyes glittered slyly. Stroking his chin-beard, he stepped to one side of the dais. His handsome black boots mirrored the glow of the flames.

"We seem to have reached an *impasse,* and yet we *must* choose a King." He cleared his throat suggestively. "Therefore I humbly suggest a truly modern devil, one whose exploits have not only been recorded and re-recorded in literature, but who has also appeared extensively in the cinema and who is being seen, perhaps at this very moment, in ten million television screens. I refer, of course, to the star of Mr. Benet's *The Devil and Daniel Webster.* This devil has shown his superior leadership by the mere fact of his conducting this selection."

He bowed from the hips, then straightened, smiling. "In short, I suggest myself."

An aura of indecision seemed to hover over the amphitheatre. Then a snort of disgust sounded in the front row.

A Russian devil reeking of vodka and borscht exploded, "Should we have a King who was mercilessly humiliated by that mere mortal, Daniel Webster?—a devil who to this day dares not set foot in the state of New Hampshire? *Nyet,* I say. *Nyet!*"

Mr. Scratch appeared to wilt into a limbo of despondency. "Then who, *who* should be our King?"

"Me," piped a thin, shrill voice.

A spindly-legged, purple-fleshed creature ambled down a smoky aisle. He was the size of a small,

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somewhat undernourished child, and was humanly shaped save for his two immense ears and his huge eyes that were like blood-veined saucers.

"Who are *you?*" grumbled Mr. Scratch.

"Elmer."

"Never heard of you. Who created you?"

"I was created in 1956 by Homer L. Thwaitwhistle of Triple Rivers, Arkansas. The bit of literature describing my career was titled *The Case of the Pernicious Penguin and the Very Nude Young Lady,* or *The Adventures and Misadventures of Nell in the Maelstrom of Iniquity.*"

"Never heard of it."

"Of course not. It's unpublished. It was rejected some thirty-seven times, after which Mr. Thwaitwhistle resumed his position as a grocery store clerk."

Mr. Scratch sneered. "Who ever heard of a purple devil? Why in Heaven did he make you purple?"

"Probably because I was born in a purple passage. But actually I'm not a devil at all—"

"Not a devil!" burst Mr. Scratch.

"Throw him out!" roared Marlowe's Mephistopheles.

"One moment, please," said Elmer. "I'm not a devil, and that's exactly why I should be your King. I am, as Mr. Thwaitwhistle described me, a biological synthesis of *fear.* Editors have called me unconvincing, but nevertheless here I am—the only such presence, I believe, in your midst, and possibly the only one ever imagined. You said yourself that you were born out of man's fear. Therefore, without that fear, none of you would exist. In other words, without *me* none of you would exist."

The saucer-like eyes roamed the scowling, fiery faces.

"Any objections?"

Silence.

The King of the Devils ascended his Throne of Flame.

Once a year in leading cities throughout the United States readers of science fiction and the writers and the editors, the artists and bibliophiles, all get together in convivial fashion for a most stirring event. It's called THE WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION *and if you've attended one of these gatherings you won't have to be urged to make your reservations now for the* 14th W. S. F. C., *to be held in New York City from August 31 thru Sept. 3. This convention will have four days of entertainment, including a costume party, a banquet, a S. F. movie preview, speeches, displays, exhibits and many more exciting events, with famed British rocket authority and "Book-of-the-Month Club" writer Arthur C. Clarke as guest of honor. For further details get in touch with World Science Fiction Society, Inc., P. O. Box 272, Radio City Station, New York 19, N. Y., and start planning now for the biggest one yet!*

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the voiceless sentinels

by . . . Roger Dee

The Primes and the primitive Stampers looked at reality through quite different eyes. That alone was frightening—

WHEN THEY came back down the slope from the Prime ship the *Unis'* helicar was waiting.

Their wives waited with it, Floris Coulter at the controls and Lillian D'Anteri on the seat behind, each betraying after her own fashion a relief at their safe return that overrode, for the moment, the anxiety that had gripped them since the arrival of the Primes.

Owen Coulter forestalled their questions with the authority of long habit. "No time for talk now," he said. "We'll call a council as soon as you can get us back to the *Unis.*"

Louis D'Anteri's control was less rigid. He paused with a foot on the helicar's mounting-step to turn a dark, rebellious face back toward the Prime ship that crowned the slope above.

"They ordered us home," he said angrily. "Do they own the Galaxy? They treat us like idiot children—"

"Let it wait, Louis," Coulter said. "We'll decide how we feel about their decision after we decide what to do about it."

Still he felt a share of his lin-

Somehow the very name, Roger Dee—we've pointed this out before—conjures up resplendent visions of pirate's gold and a Jolly Roger fluttering in the breeze on the Spanish Main. We're not suggesting that Mr. Dee's everyday personality is in the least piratelike. It can hardly be denied that he has a quite wonderful way of making his characters walk the plank, if they happen to be unworthy Earthmen confronted by the anger of a star race immeasurably wise.

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guist's resentment when he followed D'Anteri's glance to the enigmatic sphere of the Prime ship, glowing with a pearl's soft perfection in the bright Sirian sunlight.

"Take us up," he said to Floris. He squinted against the Sirian glare, gauging its intensity. "It will be dark within a couple of hours, and the sooner we let everyone know what we're up against the sooner we can settle on a course of action."

There must be action if they were to find a way out, he thought grimly as he settled himself beside his wife. Humanity had too many dreams and too many millions invested in this first stellar venture to surrender it without a struggle.

The helicar swung low over a green plain toward a tree-dappled expanse of shining water. The uncompromising spire of the *Unis* loomed up in massive silhouette over a far roll of ground ahead, uninspiring to him now that he had seen the functional grace of the Prime ship. Beyond and below the *Unis,* not yet seen but imminently visible, the Stamper lakeshore village lay sprawled in its haphazard straggle of gouged-out vegetable plots, its crude clusters of mud-and-stone hovels looking like nothing so much as a colony of misshapen beehives.

At the brook, the helicar skimmed directly over the shambling quadruped bulk of an itinerant Stamper bound for the village. Its close-set hoofs struck up slow ponderous puffs of dust from the grass and its anterior snout dangled clumsily. There was something grotesque about the way its prehensile lip clutched the leaf-rolled bundle of its small possessions. Utterly without auditory sense, it remained unconscious of their passage until the machine soared into visual range. Then it halted abruptly to stare with the characteristic Stamper goggle of flat-faced incomprehension.

"Cattle!" D'Anteri said, his voice edged with contempt.

The helicar swept lower, and at the top of the next slope Coulter was relieved to see four waiting figures at the *Unis'* ground-level entrance port. His relief vanished, however, when he saw that only two of the four were human. He had hoped that his crew would hang together to hear the outcome of his mission. But the remaining figures, from their towering dun-colored bulk, could only be the unceasing, senseless Stamper watch.

D'Anteri, behind him, said querulously: "They are still there after two weeks, goggling at the ship. What do they *want,* Owen?"

Coulter shrugged, dismissing the minor irritant. "Without auditory communication, they'll never tell us," he said. "That's Lloyd Mason's problem anyway, Louis."

Mason was indulging his ecologist's dedicated curiosity when Floris set the helicar down before the *Unis'* vertical bulk. The waiting couple were Jerome and Janet

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Bishop, the ship's dietician and electronicist respectively. They came forward at once to meet Coulter, circling to clear the pair of goggling Stampers.

"What was it, Owen?" Bishop demanded. He was bareheaded, in shorts and singlet like the others, and his gangling eagerness made him look like an impatient sandy crane. "What did they want?"

"They want us to go home," Coulter said. "They ordered us back to Earth until we're civilized enough to rate their permission to spread out of our own system."

He looked toward the open entrance port, impatient now to get his council discussions started. "Where are the Masons?" he demanded.

Bishop grimaced. "There was some stir of activity in the Stamper village and Lloyd went down there to take notes. Emily went along to see that he came to no harm."

"I'm sure they'll be back any minute now," Janet Bishop said pacifically. She was a small, plump woman with soft brown hair and warm brown eyes, and her easy patience was a perfect governor to Bishop's hastiness. "Emily will have seen the helicar land. She'll bring Lloyd on the double."

Coulter squinted restively down the slope at the unlovely sprawl of Stamper huts.

"They'd need thirty minutes to walk up, even if they started right now," he said. "We haven't any time to lose. Will you go after them in the helicar, Louis?"

The little linguist scowled. "Why bother? Lloyd wouldn't have an opinion to offer beyond his latest wild surmise about Stamper psychology, and Emily would only bicker."

"We still have to take a vote. Any concerted action requires the sanction of the entire crew."

D'Anteri swore in open exasperation. "I know, I know. You always have to do it by chapter and verse."

"It's the only safe course," Coulter told him mildly. "Let small issues go, and bigger ones follow. That's why they made me captain before we left Earth, Louis. I'm methodical enough—and unimaginative enough—to take responsibility seriously."

D'Anteri yielded with his usual ill-grace. "They were right, of course. And you're right now. But do you have to be so damned exact about *everything?*"

Coulter let it go without replying and turned instead to his ship. D'Anteri climbed into the helicar and shot it forcibly aloft, expending in his violence some of the congenital resentment that smoldered in him.

Seconds later, he was setting the small plane down at the edge of the Stamper village.

Lloyd and Emily Mason came up together as D'Anteri stilled his engine, their disproportion of build and disposition giving them the intangible aspect of being a single

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individual divided into complementary, mobile halves. Mason was small, round, bald and bespectacled, and fired with an introverted enthusiasm for his work that dismissed outside concerns as negligible. His wife was both thinner and inches taller, and she was silent to the point of primness. Her resolution, in fact, was as adequate a foil to Mason's vagueness as Janet Gibson's mildness was to her own husband's irritability.

Characteristically, Mason's initial remark dealt with his own immediate interest rather than with the problem of the Primes.

"They're getting set for something big here in the village," he said. The waning Sirian sunlight flashed on his spectacles when he looked back at the slow, elephantine stirring among the huts. "They're a devilishly consistent species in spite of their limitations, and their pattern of behavior is beginning to make sense. Give me a few weeks more and—"

"We may not have even a few hours," D'Anteri interposed bluntly. "The Primes warned us off when Owen and I went up to answer their summons. That's why I came for you two. We're going to hold a council of action immediately."

Mason plucked off his glasses and polished them unhappily. "But we can't go *now*—not just when I'm making progress! Louis, I learned only this morning why the occasional itinerant singles roll up their little gaggle of possessions and wander off. It's their system of gene balance—of keeping the stock fresh by sending out old blood and bringing in new. And it isn't simple instinct. It's a calculated system, don't you see?"

D'Anteri studied the lumbering in the village with open distaste. There were hundreds of Stampers gathered now in the central concourse and the slow thudding of their hoofs, raising the sound that had given them their name, drifted about him on a breeze heavy with the smell of alien bodies and windborne dust.

The brutes were more primitive than consistent, he thought—a blind alley of evolution, a fumbling experiment prisoned in a narrow rut of sense limitation that made impossible any real improvement of species. Without language or hearing, with restricted vision and a metabolic rate so low that it rendered thought as clumsy as their snail's-pace locomotion, what improvement could there be?

He dismissed them from mind. "The others are waiting," he said. "Get in, will you?"

Mason clipped on his glasses again with a gesture of resolution. "I'll stay here, and use the time remaining to me. The others can confer without me."

"Don't be a fool," D'Anteri said waspishly. "We've little enough time, and you're wasting it."

Emily Mason answered him like a schoolmistress quelling an incipient argument between children.

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"Lloyd was sent here to study whatever ecology we found, Louis. He's only pursuing that study."

Mason looked from one to the other, his round face distressed. The emergency demanded a directness foreign to his nature, and he met it reluctantly.

"I'd rather trust Emily's judgment than my own," he said. "And we've a proxy provision for absent members. Emily can go with you and cast my vote as she thinks best."

It was typical of his wife that she did not protest so sensible a conclusion. She said decisively, "I'll come back for you immediately after the council. If you need me before then, use your communicator."

She climbed into the helicar and seated herself primly beside D'Anteri. "I'm quite ready."

Mason was already at work on his field notes when the helicar rose into the air.

COULTER, with his crew assembled, launched into council discussion without delay. He had set up a view-screen at one end of the quarters bay, directly opposite the ship's tape projector. He had also paused to deliver a brief oration about the importance of dimming the quarters lights, feeling a need to make clear to all the seriousness of their position. Floris and the D'Anteris, Bishops, and Emily Mason sat on their bunks along the narrow length of the bay, waiting for him to continue.

"You know that the Prime ship appeared only two hours ago," he said, at last. "Janet and Floris saw it land, and all of us heard the Primes summon me. The call came through very clearly on the ship's communicators."

He paused, disturbed even in retrospect by the passionless assurance of that alien voice.

"We didn't even remotely suspect until then that such a race of overlords existed in the Galaxy," Coulter said. "Assuming, of course, that they *are* overlords. At any event, the situation had to be faced —so Louis and I went up to see them. We took along one of Lloyd's little undergarb recorders to tape the actual interview for the rest of you. The film will show what the Primes and their ship are really like."

He snapped on the projector. The screen lighted, centering on the pearly sphere of the Prime ship. The motion of Coulter's approach made the scene bob jerkily until the sphere filled the screen and an opening dilated in its hull.

D'Anteri's small figure, pushing ahead to meet possible danger, blotted out the picture briefly. Then there appeared on the clearing screen an interior that was a concave reversal of the outer hull, identical with it except for a smooth expanse of floor concealing the lower third of the ship. Whatever engines drove the craft quite obviously lay below deck. There were no ports or vision screens or con-

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trol banks, no visible break in the overall concavity of polished surface.

The two Primes waited at the center of the circular floor, looking like nothing so much as wingless, unfeathered cranes, glabrous and fragile. There was grace and unmistakable intelligence in their every aspect as they regarded Coulter and D'Anteri out of their dark, pupilless eyes.

"Avian," Jerome Bishop said wonderingly.

His wife said simply, "They're lovely. How can they be so cruel?"

Floris' reaction was more practical. "They don't look like tyrants. Maybe they're right, Owen. Maybe we *do* seem like savages to them. Maybe they're justified in saying we've broken away from our reservation too soon for our own safety."

"We can't judge a creature's nature or intent by its appearance," Coulter pointed out. "They're a totally alien species, so we've simply no basis for comparison. We can only choose between our own need and the risk we may run if we should decide to defy them."

He halted the projector, freezing the scene.

"They didn't actually threaten us. They only made it quite plain that we must go home. The problem is, does their leaving us no alternative imply that they have the power to enforce their order?"

"They're physically insignificant," Bishop said. "Did you see anything that looked like heavy armament, Owen?"

Coulter shook his head. "Only what you see here."

D'Anteri looked speculatively down the long room. "They don't look like a race that knows violence. There's a good chance that they're not armed at all."

The others looked at one another uneasily, disturbed to find their own inference so bluntly stated.

"So how do we know," Bishop finished, "that they can force us to go?"

Coulter said quietly, "Putting them to the test could be dangerous. They're infinitely far ahead of us in general development. Their armament may be completely beyond us."

D'Anteri disagreed. "I seriously doubt that. I doubt if there's anything in their ship's drive, for instance, that we couldn't work out with enough research time. There are only so many physical properties and so many corollary applications. We're not stupid, and we're a determined species."

"State your proposition, Louis."

"It's this," D'Anteri said. "We can't defy them and then sit tight without giving up the initiative. Neither can we run like sheep until we are sure that they can enforce their ultimatum."

Bishop sat up straighter. "You've got something there, Louis. They may be only a local culture, a minor species without any real authority

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at all. If they're just *bluffing—*"

"We'll have to find that out," D'Anteri said, "or run home like scolded children. There's no compromise measure here. Whatever we do will be final, one way or another."

Bishop said almost dreamily, "Two birds with one stone. Earth could use a drive like the one that powers that sphere. It could speed up our colonization program by generations."

"You're suggesting," Coulter said, "that we attack and take over their ship by surprise. Remember that we'd risk more than our lives. We could set colonization *back* for generations if we lose the *Unis.* Would our people at home approve of that, Louis?"

D'Anteri answered the question with another. "Would they approve if we give up here without a fight?"

There was a hiatus that dragged interminably until D'Anteri said, "Question."

They voted quickly and silently by a show of hands. Emily Mason, sharing her husband's aversion to violence, voted against attack. Coulter did not vote, but his ballot was unnecessary.

The other five voted solidly to fight.

D'Anteri, for the first time in weeks, looked almost happy. "One man is enough," he said. "I'll take the helicar and a fission bomb from the munitions hold. One bomb should do it."

They did not argue because D'Anteri alone had both the aggressiveness and hair-fine coordination which would be needed. But when he went to the personnel lift to drop down to ground level his wife accompanied him, deaf to his protests.

"It can't be helped if none of us go back to Earth," she said. "But I won't go back without you."

When they had gone, the remaining five looked at one another restively. Coulter, seeking escape from the strain of waiting, restarted his projector.

"We may as well see the rest of the film," he said.

LEFT ALONE at the Stamper village, Mason found it all but impossible to concentrate on the growing stir of activity before him. He had expected to dismiss the problem of the Primes by leaving it to others better qualified than himself. But an uncharacteristic disquiet nagged at him when he returned to the task of reassembling his notes.

The nub of his uneasiness resided in the fact that he had not himself considered any other course but that of accepting the Prime ultimatum, with as much delay as possible to allow him time for unravelling the mystery of the Stampers' excitement. But suppose the others should decide differently?

Suppose they decided to remain and fight?

The prospect of open conflict distressed him profoundly, so dis-

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turbing his work that he broke off to polish his glasses unhappily. Violence was totally foreign to his mild nature, the thought of physical harm to Emily insupportable.

"I should have gone back with Louis," he said aloud.

He turned to gauge the time remaining before darkness fell, and found the molten-silver furnace of Sirius sliding down below the horizon. Too much time had elapsed already. He'd have to hurry.

He had taken his communicator unit from his belt to ask Coulter for a delay of discussion before the absurdity of making an open call occurred to him. The Primes had summoned Coulter before on that same frequency. Whatever he said now would be intercepted, defeating and destroying the purpose of the council aboard the *Unis*.

"I could walk back," Mason thought. But the slope leading up to the *Unis*' needle-shape seemed impossibly long and tedious, swaying his decision. "Or," he alternatized with happy inspiration, "I can call Emily to come for me in the helicar."

He was thumbing the stud of his communicator when the first wave of Stampers flowed out of the village and bowled him over.

He lost his grip on the communicator and weaved about in a frantic effort to dodge the slow pound of dun-colored hoofs. For an instant he was certain that he would be trampled to pulp, and a mental picture of Emily returning alone and inconsolable to Earth flashed through his mind, filling him with a greater horror than the thought of his own imminent death.

In the end he escaped—not by his own efforts but simply because the slow, pistoning lift of a Stamper hoof caught him and flung him, breathless and half-stunned, out of the melee.

For a full minute he lay frozen and incredulous, gulping down great breaths of dusty air while the Stamper herd plodded furiously past. Finally the deliberate regrouping of their ranks told him—amazing him with his own dispassionate ecologist's eye for detail—that whatever purpose had been slowly building up in them at the village had come to a head and that they were now determinedly on the march toward its fulfillment.

He sat up and stared toward the van, and beyond it. And all at once he was no longer in doubt as to their destination. It was the *Unis*, rising out of growing dusk with a silver spark of Sirius-light still glowing on her spire.

Mason struggled to his feet and ran up the slope as fast as his pudgy legs would carry him, straight toward his ship.

THE SCREEN moved.

"Watch this," Coulter said. "This is the part where the Primes told us we'd have to go. We tried to argue, but—well, here it is."

Coulter himself did not show on

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the screen because the recorder had been concealed under his singlet. D'Anteri's figure, a little out of focus, went stiff with anger.

"But we've only been here two weeks," D'Anteri's voice said. "And you've been here only *two hours*. How can you have learned enough about us in that little time to judge us?"

There ensued a silence. A moment later Coulter's voice said, "If you know that much about us, you must realize how important this venture is to our culture. We've traveled far from our own solar system because our home planet is over-populated. But we plan no military conquest. We're not a cruel or tyrannous people."

There was another silence.

D'Anteri's recorded voice, thick with disgust, said suddenly: "The Stampers? They're less than barbarians. They're *cattle!*"

The screen stilled under Coulter's numbed touch. Lights came on. There was a murmur of startled surmise up and down the quarters bay.

"The Primes' voices didn't record," Floris said. "Why, Owen?"

Coulter turned on Bishop. "You are charged with the care of all electronic equipment, Jerome. Did you check that recorder?"

Bishop stood up, his face crimson. "There's absolutely nothing wrong with that recorder. Your voice and Louis' registered, didn't they?"

Coulter seemed to wilt slowly. "Then there were no Prime voices," he said. "I—I guess you all know what that means."

Emily Mason, with precise logic, answered first. "It means that there was no original summons over our communicator equipment. The Primes don't speak. They're telepathic."

Coulter nodded. "Of course. That's how they knew so much about us within two hours of their landing. They knew our language and what our intentions were. No wonder there were no weapons or engine controls in their ship. Everything is *mental* with them, perhaps even their propulsor power."

"Then they are aware of everything we've thought and planned," Floris said. "We hadn't a chance of surprising them from the first."

"Poor Louis and Lillian," Janet Gibson said. She began to cry softly. No one else spoke.

They were still sitting there quietly when the slow thunder of Stamper hoofs broke the night silence. Gibson climbed the companionway ladder to the control room for a look outside, and came back swiftly, his face drained of all color.

"The brutes are moving this way," he said. "Hundreds of them. Maybe thousands."

Emily Mason said, *"Lloyd,"* in a smothered voice, and went up the ladder at a run. The others followed at her heels.

The Stamper herd was very near now, flowing like a ponderous

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living surf up the slope. The growing rumble of hoofs sent a trembling through the entire ship.

Mason came into view finally a hundred yards ahead of the main Stamper van, a tiny running figure reeling with exhaustion. His wife saw him first in the near-darkness and would have taken the personnel lift down alone if Bishop and Coulter had not instantly plunged into the cage after her.

The three of them met Mason just outside the central airlock, carried him inside, and sent the lift flying upward to quarters bay.

They eased him gently down on his bunk, and stood by while his stertorous breathing quieted. Emily held one of his plump wrists between her fingers and counted his pulsebeats with a pinched look of controlled strain.

"There's no permanent damage," she said at last, when his heart had slowed its frantic pounding. "It was just over-exertion. He'll be all right in a moment."

Coulter bent over the still heavily breathing ecologist. "What happened, Lloyd? Surely the Stampers aren't trying to attack the ship?"

Mason tried to answer but could not. He closed his eyes and lay back, giving up the attempt. His wife looked apprehensively at Coulter.

"They can't possibly get in, can they?" she asked.

"Of course not," Coulter assured her. "There's nothing to worry about. They're no more than a pack of dogs, for all their size."

Still he flinched with the rest when the plangent slamming of the lower entrance port came to them up the elevator shaft. It was not until the lift-cage dropped by itself, summoned from below, that he realized the truth.

"That will be Louis and Lillian with the helicar," Coulter said. "It has to be. No Stamper could manipulate those port controls, let alone bring down the lift."

"The Primes could," Floris said, but no one took her seriously. The Primes would not have bothered.

The D'Anteris were with them a moment later. Lillian had been crying, and D'Anteri's face had a pinched, beaten look.

"I couldn't drop the bomb," he said. "It—disappeared."

In the hiatus that followed Lillian went to stand with Emily beside Mason. She only nodded when the Stamper demonstration was explained to her. But D'Anteri, when they told him what they knew of the Primes, threw up his hands in his characteristic gesture of resignation.

"Then we're whipped," he said. "We may as well go home—before the *Unis* disappears like my bomb. Maybe the Primes are right, and we're not really ready for stellar colonies. If we haven't outgrown wars at home—"

Coulter cut in with, "We'll take a vote on that."

Mason summoned the strength to sit up and say, "Home," with

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the rest. The vote was unanimous.

"Then we'll blast off as soon as the field is clear," Coulter said. Relief made his voice almost light. "But there's no point in cremating hundreds of those poor devils down there. How long before they'll drift away, Lloyd?"

"Before morning," Mason said. "I'm sure of that."

Mason's breathing was still ragged and his round face streamed with perspiration. But he was himself again. Something like professional satisfaction colored his voice when the others gathered about him.

"I told you they were a consistent species," he said to D'Anteri. "Haven't they proved it?"

D'Anteri stared. "Precisely what are you getting at, Lloyd?"

"Intelligence and logic aren't strictly synonymous," Mason said. "But they're nearly so—nearly enough, at any rate, to make reasoning a relative function. The Stampers felt toward us precisely as we felt toward the Primes, and because their logic was the same as ours they followed the same course. To be safe, they had to eliminate us and take over our ship. That they needed two weeks instead of two hours to make that decision and plan an attack is a case in point. The difference in relative intelligence accounts for the time lag."

Bishop laughed, an incredulous bark of sound. "You mean that those idiotic creatures, with their limitations, actually expected to take us over? Ship and all?"

It was Coulter, first as usual to grasp the basic reality of a new situation, who answered him.

"They had a better chance than we did," he said.

In the current issue of THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, *now on the newsstands,* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE'S *highly popular crime companion goes all out to thrill science fantasy readers with a flair for mystery fiction at its very best. Like Isaac Asimov,* Theodore Sturgeon *has a positive genius for enlarging his audience overnight by coming up with a straight mystery yarn with an unbeatable quality of suspense. So hurry, hurry to the nearest newsstand for* DEAD DAMES DON'T DIAL, *an excursion into murder that's sure to enthrall you. We predict, too, that the new Saint novelette,* THE UNESCAPABLE WORD, *will knock you for a goal!*

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the macauley circuit

by . . . Robert Silverberg

When science adds a frightening new dimension to Man's oldest art beauty may yield to dark terror.

GENTLEMEN, I intend to be completely honest with you, completely unevasive. I destroyed Macauley's diagram, and I have never denied it. Of course I did it, and for strongly-motivated, very substantial reasons.

My big mistake was in not thinking the thing through. When Macauley first brought me the circuit, I didn't pay much attention to it—certainly not as much as its importance warranted. That was a mistake, but I couldn't help myself. I was too busy playing nursemaid to old Kolfmann to stop and think what the Macauley circuit really meant.

If Kolfmann hadn't shown up just when he did, I would have been able to make a careful study of the innovation. I would have quickly grasped all of its implications, and I would have put the diagram in the incinerator and Macauley right after it. That is not to Macauley's discredit, you understand. He's a nice, clever boy, and one of the finest minds in our whole research department. He just

A science fiction writer scarcely needs to be an imaginative gymnast to predict that cybernetics will profoundly influence our changing civilization in the future. Giant computers already in existence have removed all doubts on that score, almost terrifyingly so at times. But it takes prophetic dexterity of a high order to envision the kind of thinking machine which Robert Silverberg has brought to fruition here. If you're a music lover you may find it hard to forgive him, but we predict you'll be thrilled notwithstanding.

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can't help being too clever for his own good.

He came in while I was outlining my graph for the Beethoven Seventh which we were going to do the following week. I was adding some ultrasonics that would have delighted old Ludwig—not that he would have heard them, of course, but he would have *felt* them—and I was very pleased with my interpretation. Unlike some synthesizer-interpreters, I don't believe in actually changing the score.

I'm convinced that Beethoven knew what he was doing, and it would have been quite insane to attempt to patch up his symphony. I was simply *strengthening* it by adding the ultrasonics. They wouldn't change the actual notes in the least, but there'd be that feeling in the air which is the great artistic triumph of synthesizing.

So I was working on my graph, and making splendid progress. When Macauley came in I was engaged in changing the frequencies for the second movement, which is the difficult one. You see, the movement is solemn but not *too* solemn. Just so. Macauley had a sheaf of papers in his hand, and I knew immediately that he'd hit on something important. As a rule no one interrupts an Interpreter for something trivial.

"I've developed a new circuit, sir," he said. "It's based on the imperfect Kennedy Circuit of the year twenty-two thousand sixty-one."

I remembered Kennedy. He had been a brilliant boy, rather like Macauley in most respects. He had worked out a circuit which would have made the task of synthesizing a symphony as easy as playing a harmonica. But it hadn't quite worked. Something in the process had fouled up the ultrasonics and what came out had been hellish to hear. We never found out how to straighten things out. Kennedy disappeared about a year later and was never heard from again. All the young technicians had acquired the habit of tinkering with his circuit for diversion, hoping they'd stumble on the secret. And now Macauley had apparently succeeded.

I looked at his diagram, and then directly at him. He was standing there calmly enough with a blank expression on his handsome, intelligent face, waiting for me to quiz him.

"Am I right in assuming that this circuit controls the interpretative aspects of music?" I asked.

He nodded. "Exactly right, sir. You can set the synthesizer for whatever esthetic you have in mind, and it'll faithfully follow your instruction. You merely have to establish the esthetic coordinates—the work of a moment—and the synthesizer will handle the rest of the interpretation for you. But that's not exactly the goal of my circuit, sir," he said, tactfully, as if to hide from me the fact that he was telling me I had missed his

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point. "With minor modifications—"

He didn't get a chance to tell me, because at that precise moment Kolfmann came dashing into my studio. You see, I never lock my doors. For one thing no one would dare disturb me without good and sufficient cause, and for another my analyst had pointed out that working behind locked doors had a bad effect on my sensibilities.

I always work with my door unlocked, and that's how Kolfmann got in. And his arrival at just that moment saved Macauley's life, for if he had gone on to tell me what was on the tip of his tongue I would have regretfully incinerated him and his circuit without an instant's hesitation.

Kolfmann was a famous name to music lovers everywhere. He was perhaps eighty now—possibly ninety, if he had a good gerontologist—and he had been a brilliant concert pianist many years before. Those of us who knew something about pre-synthesizer musical history linked his name with that of Paganini, and regarded him almost with awe.

But the man I saw now was a tall, terribly gaunt old specter in ragged clothes who burst unannounced into my studio and headed straight for the synthesizer, which covered the entire north wall with its gleaming, complicated bulk.

He had a wrench in his hand heavier than a crow-bar, and he was about to destroy a million credits' worth of cybernetics when Macauley effortlessly intercepted him and took the instrument away from him. I was so flabbergasted I could only stand behind my desk and stare.

Macauley brought him over to me and I looked at him as if he were a mass murderer in the flesh.

"You poor, misguided fool," I said. "What's the idea? You can get a long prison sentence for wrecking a cyber—or didn't you know that?"

"My life is ended anyway," he said in a thick, deep, despairing voice. "It ended when your machines started desecrating music."

He took off his battered cap and ran his thin fingers through his hair. He hadn't shaved for several days, and his face was speckled with stiff-looking white stubble.

"My name is Gregor Kolfmann," he said. "I'm sure you haven't heard of me."

I had, of course, but decided to pretend otherwise. "Kolfmann, the pianist?" I asked.

My admiration was not lost on him. He nodded, pleased despite everything. "Yes, Kolfmann, the *former* pianist. You and your machine have taken away my life."

Suddenly all the hate which any normal person feels for a cybe-wrecker evaporated, and I felt guilty and very humble before this truly great old man. As he continued to speak, I realized that I, as a musical artist, had a responsibility to him. I still think that what

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I did was wise—and entirely justified.

"Even after synthesizing became the dominant method of presenting music," he went on, "I continued my concert career. There were always a few discerning people who would rather see a man play a piano than watch a technician feed a tape through a machine. But I couldn't compete with the machines."

He sighed. "After a while anyone who went to live concerts was looked upon as a reactionary, and I stopped getting bookings. I turned to teaching as a means of livelihood. But no one wanted to take piano lessons. A few have studied with me for antiquarian reasons, but they are not artists. They are just curiosity-seekers. They have no artistic drive. You and your machines have much to answer for!"

I looked at Macauley's circuit and then at Kolfmann. I put away my graph for the Beethoven, partly because all the excitement had made it impossible for me to get anywhere with it and partly because I knew it would only make things worse if Kolfmann actually saw what Macauley had done.

Macauley was still standing expectantly before my desk, waiting to explain his circuit to me. I knew it was important. But I felt deeply indebted to old Kolfmann, and I decided to take care of him before I let Macauley do any more talking.

"Come back later," I told him. "I'd like to discuss the implications of this innovation—as soon as I'm through talking to Mr. Kolfmann."

"Yes, sir," Macauley said, like the obedient puppet a technician becomes when he is confronted by an unbending superior. As soon as the door closed behind him I gathered up the papers he had left and stacked them in a neat pile on my desk. I didn't want Kolfmann to see them for one moment, even though I knew they wouldn't mean anything to him except as symbols of the machine he hated.

As soon as we were alone I gestured Kolfmann to a plush pneumochair, into which he settled with the distaste for excess comfort which had been so characteristic of his generation. I saw my duty plainly. I must make things better for the old man.

"We'd be glad to have you come to work for us, Mr. Kolfmann," I said smiling. "A man of your great brilliance—"

He was up and out of that chair in a second, his eyes blazing. "Work for you? I'd sooner see you dead and your machines crumbling! Your scientists have dealt a death blow to art, and now you're trying to bribe me!"

"I was just trying to help you," I said, soothingly. "Since, in a manner of speaking, we've interfered with your livelihood, I consider it my duty to make amends in any way I can."

He said nothing, but stared at

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me coldly, with the anger of half a century burning uncompromisingly in him.

"Look," I said. "Let me show you what a great musical instrument the synthesizer actually is."

I rummaged in my cabinet and withdrew the tape of the Hohenstein Viola Concerto which we had performed in '69. It was a rigorous twelve-tone work and it was probably the most demanding, unplayable piece of music ever written.

It was, of course, no harder for the synthesizer to counterfeit than the notes of a Strauss waltz. But a human violist would have needed three hands and a prehensile nose to convey more than a tiny sampling of Hohenstein's musical thought. I activated the playback of the synthesizer and fed the tape in.

The music burst forth in a magnificent opening stanza, and Kolfmann watched the machine suspiciously. The pseudo-viola danced up and down the tone-row while the old pianist struggled painfully to place the work.

"Hohenstein?" he finally asked, his voice tremulous with awe.

I saw that a conflict was raging within him. For more years than he cared to remember he had hated us with a burning hate because we had made his art obsolete. And here I was showing him a use for the synthesizer which more than justified its existence. It was synthesizing a work impossible for a man or woman to play. He was unable to reconcile the paradox in his mind, and the struggle to do so hurt. He got up uneasily and started for the door.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"Away from here," he said. "You are a devil."

He tottered weakly through the door, and I let him go. The old man was badly confused. But I had a trick or two up my cybernetic sleeve to settle at least some of his problems and salvage him for the world of music. For, whatever else you say or think about me—particularly after this Macauley business—you can't deny that my deepest allegiance is to music.

For the rest of the day I stopped work on my Beethoven Seventh, and put away Macauley's diagram, and called in a couple of competent technicians and told them what I was planning. Our first line of inquiry, I decided, would be to find out who Kolfmann's piano teacher had been. We had the reference books out in a flash, and found the man without much difficulty. His name was Kellerman, and he had died nearly sixty years before. Here luck was with us. Central was able to locate and supply us with an old tape of the International Music Congress held at Stockholm in 2187.

At that meeting Kellerman had spoken briefly on *The Development of the Pedal Technique*. His discussion had been extremely boring, but it wasn't the subject matter which interested us. We split his speech up into phonemes, analyzed,

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rearranged, evaluated, and finally went to the synthesizer and began feeding in tapes.

What we got back was a new speech in Kellerman's voice—or reasonable facsimile thereof. Certainly it would be good enough to fool Kolfmann, who hadn't heard his old teacher's voice for more than half a century. When we had everything ready I sent for the old musician and a couple of hours later they brought him in, looking even more dispirited and more worn.

"Why do you bother me?" he asked. "Why do you not let me die in peace."

I ignored his questions. "Listen to this, Mr. Kolfmann," I said. I flipped on the playback, and the voice of Kellerman came out of the speaker.

"Hello, Gregor," it said. Kolfmann was profoundly startled. I took advantage of the prearranged pause in the recording to ask him if he recognized the voice. He nodded, his lips white. I could see that he was frightened and suspicious, and I hoped that the whole plan wouldn't backfire.

"Gregor, one of the things I tried most earnestly to teach you—and you were my most attentive pupil—was that you must always be flexible. Techniques constantly change, even though great art remains unchanged. But you did not take my advice."

Kolfmann was starting to realize what we had done. His pallor was ghastly now.

"Gregor, the piano is an outmoded instrument. But there is a newer, and a greater instrument available to you. Why do you deny greatness? The wonderful new synthesizer can do all that the piano could do—and more. It is a tremendous step forward—"

"All right," Kolfmann said. His eyes were gleaming strangely. "Turn that machine off."

I reached over and flipped off the playback.

"You are very clever," he told me. "I take it you used your synthesizer to prepare this little speech for me."

I nodded.

"Well, you have been highly successful—in your silly, theatrical way," he said. He paused and shook his head. "And I—I have been even more foolish than you. I have stubbornly resisted when I should have joined forces with you. Instead of hating you, I should have been the first to learn how to create music with a new and untried instrument."

Such was the measure of his greatness! He could with complete honesty and complete humility admit error and rechart his entire career.

"It's not too late to learn," I said. "We could teach you."

Kolfmann looked at me steadily for an instant, and I felt a shiver go through me. But my elation knew no bounds. I had won a great battle for music, and I had won it with ridiculous ease.

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He went away for a full month to master the technique of the synthesizer. I gave him my best men, the technicians I had been grooming to take over in my place when age forced my retirement. In the meantime I completed my Beethoven, and the performance was a most gratifying success. And then I got back to Macauley and his circuit.

Once again circumstances conspired to keep me from fully realizing just how serious a threat the circuit had posed. I did manage to grasp that it could be refined to eliminate almost completely the human element in musical interpretation. But I had ceased to concern myself with laboratory work for so long a period that I no longer adhered to my old habit of studying any sort of diagram and mentally tinkering with it and juggling it to see if some greater use could not be made of it.

While I was examining the circuit one disturbing thought did occur to me, however. Since anyone would be able to create a musical interpretation, and artistry would no longer be an operative factor I might very well find myself out of a job. I was worrying about that when Kolfmann came in with some tapes. He looked twenty years younger. His face was no longer haggard and despairing and there was a triumphant sparkle in his eyes.

"I will say it again," he told me, placing the tapes on my desk. "I have been a fool. I have wasted my life. Instead of tapping away at a silly little instrument I might have created a new music with this machine. Look. I began with Chopin. Put this on."

I slipped the tape into the synthesizer and the F Minor Fantasia came rolling into the room. I had heard that majestic drum roll a thousand times, but never with such glorious overtones.

"This machine is the noblest instrument I have ever played," he said.

I looked at the graph he had drawn up for the piece, in his painstaking, crabbed handwriting. The ultrasonics were literally incredible. In just a few weeks he had mastered subtleties it had taken me fifteen years to learn. He had discovered what skillfully-chosen ultrasonics, beyond the range of human hearing—but not beyond perception—could do. He had discovered how to expand the horizons of music to a point that would have been inconceivable to the pre-synthesizer composers, with their crude instruments and faulty knowledge of sonics.

The Chopin almost made me cry. It wasn't so much the actual notes which Chopin had written, and which I had heard so many times before. It was more the unheard notes the synthesizer was striking in the ultrasonic range. The old man had chosen his ultrasonics with the skill of a craftsman —no, with the hand of a genius.

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I saw Kolfmann in the middle of the room, standing proudly while the piano rang out—a glorious tapestry of sound.

He handed me another tape and I put it on. It was the Bach Toccata and Fugue in D Minor, and as the sound of a super-organ mingled with the soaring supersonics the unearthly splendor of the composition almost took my breath away. And Kolfmann stood there entranced.

I looked at him and tried without success to relate him to the seedy old man who had attempted to wreck the synthesizer a few short weeks before.

As the Bach drew to its close I thought of the Macauley circuit, again, and of the whole beehive of blank-faced technicians striving to perfect the synthesizer by eliminating the one imperfect element: Man. And I woke up.

My first decision was to suppress the Macauley circuit until after Kolfmann's death, which could not be long delayed. I made this decision out of sheer kindness. Kolfmann, after all these years, was having a moment of supreme triumph. If I let him know that no matter how magnificent his achievement became the new circuit could do it better, he would never survive the blow.

He fed the third tape in himself. It was the Mozart Requiem Mass, and I was astonished by the inspired brilliance which had enabled him to master the difficult technique of synthesizing voices. Still, with the Macauley circuit, the machine could handle all such details by itself.

As Mozart's sublime music swelled and rose, I took out the diagram Macauley had given me, and stared at it grimly. At that moment I reached my final decision. I would pigeonhole it until the old man died. Then I would reveal it to the world and, having made my own future meaningless, would sink into peaceful obscurity with at least the assurance that Kolfmann had died happy.

It was sheer kindheartedness, gentlemen. There was nothing malicious or reactionary about it. I didn't intend to stop the progress of cybernetics—at least, not at that point.

No. I didn't make my last shattering discovery until I got a better look at what Macauley had done. Quite possibly he didn't even realize it himself, but I could be pretty shrewd about such things. Mentally, I added a wire or two here, altered a contact there, and suddenly the full truth dawned on me.

Macauley had assured me that a synthesizer hooked up with the new circuit wouldn't need a human being to provide an esthetic guide to its interpretation of music. Up to now, the synthesizer could imitate the pitch of any sound in or out of nature. But we had to control the volume, the timbre, and all the other factors which make up interpretation of music. With Ma-

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cauley's innovation the synthesizer could handle every one of those factors.

But also, I now realized, it could *create its own music*—from scratch, and with no human help. Not only the conductor but the composer would become obsolete. The synthesizer would be able to function independently of any human being. And art gives dignity and purpose and direction to human life.

That was when I ripped up Macauley's diagram and heaved the paperweight directly at the synthesizer, cutting off the Mozart in the middle of a high C. Kolfmann turned around in horror, but I was the one who was really horrified.

I know. Macauley has redrawn his diagram and I haven't stopped the wheels of science. I feel pretty futile about it all. But before you label me reactionary and send me to prison, consider this:

Art is a major, determining function of intelligent beings. When once you've created a machine capable of composing original music, capable of an artistic act, you've created an intelligent being. And one that's a great deal stronger and smarter than we are. We've synthesized our successor.

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An exceptionally well-selected anthology of the year's best science fantasy stories heads the list of new S F titles.

I THINK ALL of us look forward to a new Judith Merril anthology. Her most recent S-F volume—THE YEAR'S GREATEST SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY (Gnome Press, $3.95; Dell, 35 cents) fully justifies this anticipation. The collection, released at the same time by both Gnome Press and Dell, is the first of a series of annual anthologies of the best in imaginative literature. The present volume, in addition to material by Algis Budrys—who has become one of the more interesting writers in the field—James E. Gunn, Jack Finney, Shirley Jackson, R. H. Merliss, Avram Davidson, and others, includes Steve Allen's frightening *The Public Hating,* Zenna Henderson's sensitive and moving *Pottage,* Isaac Asimov's *Dreaming Is a Private Thing,* Theodore Sturgeon's interesting *Who?* and Robert Abernathy's amusing *Junior.* Recommended.

Lucky Starr and his young Martian sidekick, John Bigman Young, face a mad robot, tentacles of living rock, and assorted unpleasant characters, as they try to solve the prob-

The universe in books is quite as unpredictable as the universe of a Hoyle or an Eddington. Its center of gravity shifts with astounding frequency from month to month as new star-clusters form and dissolve. And Mr. Santesson is always at his best when he views it as he does here, with a wide variety and range of bright new titles to stimulate his Mount Wilsonian exploritativeness.

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lem of just who is sabotaging Project Light. Paul French's latest Lucky Starr novel, LUCKY STAR AND THE BIG SUN OF MERCURY (Doubleday, $2.50), describing the adventures of the two friends on Mercury, illustrates how easy it is for publishers to forget that quite a number of teen-agers have passed the Superman stage. This tendency is regrettable. Perhaps it would help if it could be made compulsory for Juvenile editors to sit in on younger Fan meetings. I must add though—in all fairness to Paul French who, under his own name, is one of my and your favorite people—that Lucky Starr's latest adventure *has* zest, speed and plenty of excitement.

If you're looking for an excuse to blast off to Australia sometime this fall, why not plan to stay on for the Fifth Australian Science Fiction Convention which meets in Melbourne on December 8th and 9th, 1956. Overseas fans can join the Convention for a fee of $1, which will entitle them to a membership badge, a Souvenir Booklet and the Convention report. For further details write to Ian Crozier, 6 Bramerton Road, Caulfield, S.E. 8, Victoria, Australia. Why not send a delegate from the World Convention in New York to Melbourne this Labor Day week-end.

The publishers of Harold T. Wilkins' uneven and, on the whole, rather unsatisfactory FLYING SAUCERS UNCENSORED (Citadel, $3.50), now bring us what is described as the "complete answer to the skeptic's case by an outstanding authority."

Hm.

Waveney Girvan's FLYING SAUCERS AND COMMON SENSE (Citadel, $3.50), far from being the "complete answer," is a well-meaning and (I suspect) not too well-edited personal testimony by a man who, as he puts it, feels "obliged" to examine aloud his "own mental processes at some length" and to refute charges that he was "actuated solely by a desire to profit from sensationalism" in publishing Adamski and others in England.

The rather humorless Mr. Girvan has some unkind word to say about the "miserable hacks" who contribute to British Science Fiction. "The dreary science-fiction writers of today—I am happy to learn that they are fast losing their short-lived vogue—seem to take it for granted that the reader can be bludgeoned into credulity by spattering the pages of a space opera with scientific jargon, most of which I suspect is bogus." (P. 135.)

While there is no denying that he is correct in affirming that "belief in flying saucers has certainly not been helped by the supporters it has attracted" (p. 140), Mr. Girvan's own contribution to the subject, while obviously sincere, is by no means the "complete answer to the skeptic's case." In fact you are left with a disturbed feeling

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that Mr. Girvan himself, who admittedly has the "will-to-believe," could also have been better advised editorially.

Mr. Girvan proceeds on the thesis that he has examined the worst that has been said against flying saucers, and he finds the case for the opposition "inconsistent, often dishonest and always insubstantial." (P. 156.) There is an obvious temptation to split into warring camps of converted and heathen on this subject. But my own reaction is that there is no need for this almost Wesleyan fervour in damning the heretics who "still do not see the light." There is no room for cultists here. There is, though, an obvious danger—and I think most of you will agree with me—that the scientific potentialities of the issue may in time be obscured by this zeal—particularly of the converts—which the "cause" of flying saucers has attracted. And that would be unfortunate.

On a lighter note, Gnome Press' excellent *The Science Fiction World* (write to Gnome Press, 80 East 11th Street, New York 3, for your copy) reports that the "State Department has turned thumbs down on a proposal to ship powdered oxygen to our distressed sister planet, Mars. While freely admitting that Mars is in short supply of oxygen, and conceding that government warehouses now hold millions of tons of powdered surplus, the Department pointed out that federal law prohibited them from shipping the surplus to Mars. Our neighboring planet has failed to register its representatives as Foreign Agents, and thus is cut off from all aid."

Glamorous Gerry Carlyle returns in Arthur K. Barnes' INTERPLANETARY HUNTER (Gnome Press, $3.00), based on the stories that first appeared in the late thirties. Gerry, backed by the resources of the London Interplanetary Zoo, travels from planet to planet trapping rare alien life forms and bringing them all back alive. Her voice is an ice-water jet except when she realizes that Tommy Strike is a wonderful guy, and she is in general a personality that is rather rare in a field where swashbucklers and people of action are so often space-versions of Mike Hammer.

The world of Gerry Carlyle is an interesting one, and not the least so because of the strange life-forms and intelligences that we meet in the course of her adventures. There are the Venusian *Murri,* grayish brown in color, whose large brown eyes are sad as they murmur, constantly, constantly, "Murri-Murri-Murri." There are the *Gora,* the starkly evil slave-laborers of Titan who one day would rule Saturn's strange satellite. And there are the *Proteans,* the strange and lonely intelligences who live on Almussen's comet. Recommended.

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